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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Economic and Social Council
Substantive session of 1999
Geneva, 5–30 July 1999
Item 5 of the provisional agenda**

Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance

Collaborative efforts to assist Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama and progress made with the relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts of the affected countries

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Background

1. On 24 October 1998, Atlantic tropical storm Mitch transformed itself into one of the strongest and most damaging hurricanes ever to hit the Caribbean and Central America. During the following week, its effects were felt across Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, even while the eye remained some 150 kilometres offshore. It then became stationary off the Caribbean coast of Honduras, causing torrential rains, flooding, landslides and high intensity winds. At its height, on 26 and 27 October, the hurricane reached Category 5 (the highest); it is one of only four hurricanes ever to reach that level during the twentieth century in a region often hit by tropical storms. During that period, hurricane Mitch sustained winds of almost 300 kilometres per hour and dumped heavy rains all over Central America.

2. No disaster is purely natural. The effects of hurricane Mitch were aggravated by man-made factors. Population pressures had resulted in large-scale deforestation and the cultivation of marginal lands without proper soil conservation. Those conditions left communities vulnerable to deadly floods and mudslides; flooding was aggravated by lack of adequate watershed management.

3. The poor bear the brunt of disasters such as Mitch, since they have restricted access to land and often must live in marginal, high-risk areas, such as the banks of rivers and in gullies. Many of the poorest have been hit twice, as Mitch washed away both their homes and their sources of income. Mitch aggravated pre-existing social conditions, such as unequal access to employment, land and social services. A firm consensus exists within the Central American countries that the recovery process should incorporate efforts to

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transform the social and economic conditions underlying the ecological and social vulnerability of the region.

II. Assessment of damages by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the United Nations Development Programme

4. Under the auspices of the United Nations Resident Coordinator and financed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) damage assessment missions were mobilized immediately after the hurricane, initially visiting El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. A subsequent mission to Costa Rica focused on indirect damages resulting from its economic ties with its neighbours, including reduced exports and non-payment of intraregional debt. Although Belize did not suffer the most devastating effects of hurricane Mitch, heavy rains and gusty winds took their toll on its fragile tourism industry, roads and educational facilities.

5. The ECLAC assessment revealed the following estimation of the humanitarian impact as of the end of November 1998, in numbers and as a percentage of the totals for each category for the whole region:

6. Total direct and indirect damages from hurricane Mitch in the four most affected countries were estimated to have reached over US$ 5 billion.[1] Mitch caused the widespread destruction of water distribution and sanitation systems, health-care centres, schools and other social infrastructure. It compounded existing chronic housing deficits. Stagnant water led to increased incidence of water-borne diseases and enhanced the threat of dengue fever, cholera and malaria. School attendance rates will decrease as a result of infrastructure damage and decreases in family incomes.

7. All of the above-mentioned countries suffered some degree of damage to road systems, resulting in the interruption of the trade flows within the region. Damages in the energy sector range from the temporary closing of plants to systematic energy rationing.

8. Most of the losses in the productive sector relate to agriculture. The destruction of plantations and crop fields has resulted in increased unemployment and a reduction in the foodstuffs available for poor families, and constitutes a serious threat to the food security of sections of the population. Reduced exports among the Central American economies constitute important indirect costs to the productive sector to the region as a whole.

9. Honduras demonstrates an unparalleled degree of direct and indirect damages that constitute a direct threat to the economic viability of the country. Initial estimates attributed 70 per cent of total direct and indirect damages to

Table 1
The humanitarian toll of hurricane Mitch

Category	*Honduras (percentage)*	*Nicaragua (percentage)*	*Guatemala (percentage)*	*El Salvador (percentage)*	*Total (percentage)*
Dead	5 657 (62.7)	2 863 (31.7)	268 (3.0)	240 (2.7)	9 028 (100)
Missing	8 058 (88.1)	948 (10.4)	121 (1.3)	19 (0.2)	9 146 (100)
Wounded	12 272 (94.8)	388 (3.0)	280 (2.2)	N/A	12 940 (100)
In shelters	285 000 (62.5)	65 271 (14.3)	50 000 (11.0)	55 864 (12.2)	456 135 (100)
Total evacuated	617 831 (52.3)	370 641 (31.4)	108 594 (9.2)	84 316 (7.1)	1 181 382 (100)
Total affected population [a]	4 753 537 (70.9)	867 752 (12.9)	734 198 (11.0)	346 910 (5.2)	6 702 397 (100)
As percentage of total population[b]	76.6	19.3	6.3	5.7	23.6

[a] Includes the dead, injured and homeless, as well as those who suffered material and economic losses. In the case of Honduras, this includes many city inhabitants who, at the time of the assessment, were still without basic social services.

[b] Source of estimate: Latin American Demographic Centre.

Honduras. The greatest losses are in agriculture, where not only were crops lost, but the topsoil itself was washed away by the torrential rains. Banana production, a chief source of monthly income, will take from 16 to 18 months to recuperate, while fields are cleaned of debris, topsoil replaced and new seeds planted. These losses, as well as the infrastructure damage, will have a sustained impact on the rest of the economy, especially small business, and will reduce per capita income.

10. In Nicaragua, damages are concentrated in the infrastructure sector, especially housing and roads. There is also significant damage to the productive sectors, namely agriculture, livestock and fisheries. The magnitude and economic implications of the disaster are severe and will be felt for several years. Hurricane Mitch also aggravated the already precarious conditions vis-à-vis health care, water and sanitation.

11. In El Salvador, the preliminary data showed most of the damages occurring in the agricultural sector. Guatemala also showed most losses corresponding to the agricultural sector, chiefly coffee, bananas, melons and basic grains. Close attention was given to the impact of Mitch on vulnerable populations, such as returned refugees and the internally displaced, in order to minimize the risk of eroding the gains made by those populations as a result of the peace process. Reconstruction in Guatemala will have as a defining characteristic its linkage to the peace process. This offers a further opportunity to pursue the consolidation of the process, since the priorities and themes of reconstruction and transformation are mirrored in the Peace Agreements.

Table 2
Central America: summary of direct and indirect damages (millions of United States dollars)

Sector	*Direct damages*	*Indirect damages*	*Total*
Social sectors (housing, health, education)	547.2	792.3	1 339.5
Infrastructure (roads, bridges, railways, water and sanitation, energy)	610.2	430.3	1 040.5
Productive sectors (agriculture, livestock, fisheries, forestry, industry, trade, services)	1 871.7	1 041.1	2 912.8
Environment	67.3	0.7	68.0
Total	**3 096.5**	**2 264.3**	**5 360.8**

III. Initial response of the United Nations

12. The United Nations system, its funds, programmes and specialized agencies have been operating in Central America for close to 50 years. For the past decade, the United Nations has also been active in bringing the peace process within the region to a successful conclusion. With offices in every country, the United Nations has worked in close partnership with Governments and civil society to improve the lives and livelihoods of the poorest segments of society — women, children and other vulnerable populations — namely, those who suffered the most from hurricane Mitch.

13. When the disaster struck, the United Nations system reacted immediately, taking advantage of its field presence and available stocks of medicines, food and materials. Together with the United Nations Resident Coordinators and the in-country United Nations disaster management teams (in-country representatives of United Nations agencies) in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator/Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs activated their tools for the coordination of international response: (a) issuance of situation reports highlighting unmet emergency requirements in order to mobilize international assistance and summing up international response; (b) deployment of United Nations disaster assessment and coordination teams to assist the offices of the United Nations Resident Coordinators; (c) channel for cash contributions (US$ 2.6 million) for relief and immediate rehabilitation; (d) airlifts from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs warehouse in Pisa, Italy, of emergency relief items and facilitation of shipments of water supply equipment; (e) the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Geneva was also instrumental in the mobilization of military assistance from the Netherlands (40 rescue boats, 200 military personnel), and in the coordinated use of military assets from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (helicopters).

14. In the first weeks after the disaster, the United Nations system channelled over US$ 12 million in emergency assistance. The availability of World Food Programme (WFP) food stocks in various locations played a crucial role in ensuring the immediate delivery of food to the affected areas. In all of the affected countries, the United Nations country teams worked to facilitate coordination and accelerate the implementation of already available donor support.

15. The Emergency Response Division of UNDP approved over US$ 1.2 million in the aftermath of the hurricane to strengthen the capacity of the UNDP Humanitarian Coordinator to undertake crucial coordination and information-sharing activities.

16. All the major United Nations agencies recruited additional staff or were strengthened with professionals seconded from other offices or from headquarters. In Honduras, the United Nations Resident Coordinator oversaw the creation of a decentralized field operations capacity in four locations to facilitate links with the affected population and to support and monitor the implementation of emergency programming. Over 150 local and international United Nations Volunteers were hired to help with the distribution of relief items and the evaluation of conditions in the emergency shelters. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) set up operations in Tegucigalpa to assist UNDP in carrying out a census of the people still in shelters and to support the construction of additional shelters for those unable to return home, with funds from the Government of Norway. In Nicaragua, UNDP sent focal points to the main affected areas to assist local authorities in the management of relief activities and the collection of information. The focal points worked to ensure transparency, efficiency and effectiveness in the distribution of emergency assistance.

17. In El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, the disaster management teams disseminated information on the hurricane through the creation of Web sites. These proved to be valuable sources of information on the activities of the United Nations and provided links to official governmental and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs data on the disaster and to the work of non-governmental organizations. Together with the United Nations disaster assessment and coordination teams, the United Nations country teams served as clearing houses for information on the crisis for the international community during the many assessment missions that occurred after the hurricane.

18. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) approved funds from its Emergency Programme Fund and undertook assessments of the situation of women and children. The Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) mobilized more than 60 specialists to bolster health systems. The Supply Management System, introduced to the region by PAHO/WHO was utilized in monitoring and categorizing the receipt of in-kind contributions. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) approved emergency projects to provide tools, seeds and fertilizers to farmers affected by the hurricane.

19. After meeting with the Ambassadors of Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Costa Rica and Guatemala to the United Nations on 3 November 1998, the Secretary-General sent letters to the Presidents of the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), and to the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, in which he asked for their support in easing the debt burden for the most affected countries and in providing additional soft credits for rebuilding damaged infrastructure.

IV. United Nations inter-agency transitional appeal

20. At the request of the Secretary-General, UNDP and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs brought together the United Nations system, the international financial institutions and the major non-governmental actors in providing emergency relief to the victims of hurricane Mitch to form an inter-agency task force. At the first meeting of the task force, co-chaired by UNDP and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and held in New York on 18 November 1998, the need for a United Nations inter-agency transitional appeal coordinated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs was underlined. Such an appeal would help to raise adequate support for relief needs and immediate rehabilitation, while forging links with longer-term rehabilitation. The United Nations country teams in Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua were to prepare the appeal, under the overall coordination of the United Nations Resident Coordinators and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Geneva.

21. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Geneva held an information meeting with Geneva-based missions to the United Nations and international organizations in mid-November 1998 and then organized a series of sessions with an inter-agency working group to coordinate the preparation of the transitional appeal. The following agencies, programmes and funds submitted projects for inclusion in the appeal: FAO, IOM, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNDP, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF, WFP and WHO/PAHO. The appeal covered the following sectors: health, water and sanitation, shelter, food security, education, coordination/management, and emergency telecommunications. The total amount of

resources requested amounted to US$ 153 million, of which 80 per cent related to needs in Honduras and Nicaragua, the worst affected countries. The appeal was launched during the first week of December 1998 by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UNDP in Geneva.

22. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, response to the appeal to date stands at 64 per cent, including contributions via non-governmental organizations. The WFP component, amounting to US$ 63 million, has been almost completely funded but other requirements are still to be addressed. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs held a donor information meeting in Geneva on 26 March 1999 to raise awareness of outstanding needs, drawing attention in particular to relief/rehabilitation projects requiring urgent funding.

V. Joint disaster response and recovery mission to Central America

23. The United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs proposed the undertaking of a mission to assess the contribution of the United Nations system to the emergency response, to identify additional resources required by the United Nations country teams and to propose ways of integrating disaster-reduction components in the national reconstruction and transformation plans.

24. PAHO/WHO, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNDP and UNICEF co-sponsored the mission, which was carried out during January and February 1999. The mission team met with United Nations staff, government counterparts and partners from the international community and civil society. Its main conclusions and recommendations can be summarized as follows:

1. *National Preparedness and Early Warning*. The mission team suggested that the United Nations value added during the early phases of a disaster related mainly to its capacity to provide an independent assessment of damages, to mobilize the international response and to provide reliable and timely information to all actors. For that purpose, the United Nations disaster assessment and coordination teams proved to be extremely useful.

2. *The disaster management teams*. Experience indicated that the disaster management teams worked most effectively when they could build upon previous collaboration and presence at the field level. The mission report noted that the United Nations system in Honduras had responded with a high degree of team spirit, relying on the particular skills of United Nations staff, rather than on strict observance of the respective mandates of each agency. Temporary assignment of public information officers would help ensure better communications with the media, the affected populations and the international community.

3. *Deployment of local United Nations staff*. The mission team noted the decentralized approaches taken to the United Nations response in all of the affected countries and, in particular, praised the efforts of the United Nations in Honduras, which had fielded inter-agency teams in seven locations that included 150 national and international United Nations Volunteers. These locally based staff helped local authorities and served as excellent sources of information with regard to on-site conditions.

4. *Contingency funding*. Additional emergency funding was needed to support transportation: the United Nations country teams were constrained by their inability to rent helicopters and rafts to transport relief supplies to areas cut off by the destruction of roads and bridges. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs had worked to expand contingency funding arrangements and, together with UNDP and the United Nations agencies concerned, would support the assessment of regional availability of helicopters and the development of contingency procurement agreements.

5. *Disaster reduction*. The United Nations system must work with its partners in the countries and within the donor community to heighten awareness of need to incorporate disaster mitigation into national reconstruction and transformation plans and programmes. Priority should be given to the most vulnerable populations. The United Nations should advocate increased attention to watershed and river basin management.

6. *Strengthening of country teams*. In order to accomplish recommendation No. 5, the United Nations country teams must be strengthened with respect to their own disaster response preparedness, their capacity to provide technical assistance in the assessment of current disaster management practices and in the preparation of disaster-reduction and mitigation strategies. Awareness within the United Nations system of tools of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, such as the United Nations disaster assessment and coordination

teams, the Office's Unit for mobilizing military and civil defence assets, and its warehouse, should be improved.[2]

7. *The transition from relief to development.* A more participatory, field-driven approach could improve the effectiveness of mobilizing resources for the recovery phase, combined with "flash" appeals to highlight the most urgent needs.

VI. Evaluation of preparedness and response to Mitch

25. From 16 to 19 February, disaster preparedness and response experts met in Santo Domingo to examine the lessons learned from hurricanes Georges and Mitch. The workshop was co-sponsored by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, PAHO/WHO, UNDP, UNICEF and the United Nations Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. The meeting brought together a huge number of disaster management practitioners and specialists from the Caribbean and Central America. Some of the main recommendations of the workshop can be summarized as follows:

1. The promotion of increased awareness of decision makers of the importance of vulnerability analysis, mitigation measures, and rapid damage and needs assessments.

2. The establishment of a single national coordination mechanism for disaster management with representation of all sectors and of civil society from disaster-prone areas. Staff trained in disaster management should not be subject to frequent turnover.

3. Contingency plans should be formulated at both the community and national levels, with high priority accorded to their development within national budgets. Guidelines and policies should use easily understandable language.

4. Strategies to mitigate disasters and reduce environmental vulnerability should be incorporated into development projects.

5. ECLAC and other organizations responsible for assessing damages from disasters should revise and unify methodologies to include indirect social and environmental costs, as well as the cost of modernization and transformation.

6. Systems such as the PAHO Supply Management System, should be used to improve the management of emergency supplies.

7. Journalists should be trained on disaster issues to help avoid the dissemination of rumours and incorrect information during and after disasters. Greater transparency in generating and disseminating information is necessary.

8. Early warning systems should involve local communities and be incorporated into a regular process as part of daily lives.

VII. Rehabilitation, reconstruction and transformation initiatives

26. The United Nations system continues to support immediate rehabilitation efforts while trying to focus attention on the root causes of the disaster. UNDP, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), ECLAC and PAHO/WHO have participated in an Inter-Agency Technical Committee providing technical assistance to the regional integration system (specifically, the Central American Commission on Environment and Development) for the purpose of assessing environmental risk and vulnerability in the region, and preparing a regional strategy for development along more sustainable and less vulnerable lines.

27. The Committee is part of a broad alliance of national, regional and international institutions working together at the regional level to compile and revise inventories of information and maps on environmental risk and vulnerability. The group is helping to prepare case studies in rural and urban areas on the linkages between ecological factors, disaster preparedness and the level of damages sustained by natural phenomena, as well as to formulate regional projects for presentation to the international community.

28. The Global Environmental Facility, co-implemented by the World Bank, UNDP and UNEP, is co-financing projects to strengthen the Meso-American Biological Corridor and to create a Central America Fund for Sustainable Development (FOCADES). The Biological Corridor initiative is a central tool in regional efforts to change the development agenda in the wake of hurricane Mitch. It focuses on both conservation of biological diversity and mitigation of the effects of climate change. If successful, the project should facilitate the creation of a network of protected areas and fragile zones throughout Central

America, thus helping to reduce vulnerability to future disasters.

29. FAO, in collaboration with WFP, has undertaken detailed crop and food supply assessment missions to Honduras and Nicaragua. In January 1999, WFP approved a protracted relief and recovery operation in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Although the initiative has a regional structure, its primary focus is on the most affected country, Honduras, where agricultural production was severely damaged in 100 per cent of the lowlands, where most commercial activities are based. The operation, valued at US$ 73 million, will seek to contribute to the recovery and improvement of food security of the most vulnerable segments of the population, through the active participation of beneficiaries in the restoration of productive activities. It will begin in May 1999.

30. In February 1999, UNESCO fielded a mission to the region to help Governments to prepare project documents for presentation to the donor community within the context of the Consultative Group process. It approved an "Immediate Action Plan for the Countries Affected by Hurricane Mitch", which seeks to support the process of transformation in the region. This is being done through technical assistance, small projects for the affected population, as well as through the formulation of a "Special Strategy for Central America" for approval in the next UNESCO programme and budget. Pilot projects will promote community-based effects to use solar energy in rural classrooms.

31. UNDP and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs are working together to prepare United Nations country teams and their national counterparts to improve capacities for disaster prevention and response. UNDP has approved seed resources for the development of national disaster management plans and PAHO/WHO, UNICEF, UNDP and the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs have offered to provide additional expertise on a subregional basis through the creation of an inter-agency team of disaster specialists. This team would provide backstopping to the United Nations disaster management teams and to national authorities and, in time of disaster, would join forces with the United Nations disaster assessment and coordination teams to support disaster response. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is working with national authorities in the region, and in the United States, to arrange high-level seminars to promote better coordination in the international use of military and civil defence resources in response to disasters.

32. Community participation and decentralization have been key themes in United Nations support rehabilitation and reconstruction activities. UNDP, IOM and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) are supporting the resettlement of 1,200 families on the coast of Lake Xolotlan in Managua, by facilitating the re-establishment of social services and the resettlement of affected families to safer areas. The project works with the community to restore and strengthen municipal capacities and to generate employment through microenterprises.

33. In the municipalities of northern Nicaragua that were most affected by hurricane Mitch, United Nations support builds on previous collaboration in the area between UNDP and the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) to reintegrate ex-combatants and generate employment. After the disaster struck, UNCDF approved an emergency grant for its participant communities, while UNDP, the Organization of American States (OAS), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and UNFPA worked to restore permanent shelter, strengthen municipalities, re-establish social services and reactivate production.

34. In Guatemala, United Nations inter-agency efforts have focused on the eastern part of the country, which was the most affected by the hurricane. There, the United Nations country team is working to establish for the first time a fully integrated field presence to take advantage of the wide range of expertise available from the United Nations system to promote reconstruction and transformation at the local level.

VIII. The Consultative Group process

35. In December 1998, IADB held the first Consultative Group Meeting for the Reconstruction and Transformation of Central America, in Washington, D.C. At that meeting, more than US$6 billion was pledged from the international community in disaster relief, reconstruction assistance and debt forgiveness. A second meeting of the Consultative Group is to be held in Stockholm, in May 1999, co-hosted by IADB and the Swedish Government. The meeting is introducing several innovative aspects, including the discussion by experts from Governments, civil society and the international community during thematic workshops of issues crucial to transformation in the isthmus, namely on ecological and social vulnerability; decentralization and transparency.

36. The United Nations system is working to assist Governments to develop national strategies that address

these concerns and to define with precision their national priorities. It is also promoting the participation by civil society organizations in the Consultative Group process, including the establishment of sustainable mechanisms for monitoring the reconstruction and transformation process in the wake of hurricane Mitch. In El Salvador, this approach has been particularly successful, involving the establishment and coordination, with UNDP support, of working groups on specific components of the reconstruction and transformation plan to be submitted formally by the Government to donors, with participation from a broad range of sectors.

37. At both the country and headquarters levels, the United Nations system is collaborating closely to ensure that it participates in the Stockholm meeting in a coherent and coordinated manner. The United Nations will present a single document for the region and will submit a unified pledge during the donor interventions.

IX. Conclusions

38. Hurricane Mitch reflects a change in the global environment. Victims of tropical storms, flood and drought are increasingly becoming the beneficiaries of international emergency assistance. The United Nations must utilize the same creative energies it has applied to the political crises in Central America to the less controversial but equally destructive crises triggered by natural phenomena.

39. Experts are predicting that 1999 will be another severe tropical storm season for Central America and the Caribbean. The United Nations is working with the countries of the region to prevent another disaster on the scale of hurricane Mitch, by helping to create a more sustainable framework for development.

Notes

[1] ECLAC defines direct damages as all damages to fixed assets (including property), capital and inventories of finished and semi-finished goods, raw materials and spare parts, which occur simultaneously or as a direct consequence of the natural phenomenon causing a disaster. The destruction of crops ready for harvesting must also be valued and included as direct damage. Indirect damages refer to damages to the flows of goods and services that cease to be produced or provided during a period of time beginning almost immediately after the disaster and possibly extending into the rehabilitation and reconstruction phase. Any calculation should extend to the period needed to restore all or part of the production capacity. It includes the costs or increase in costs, as well as losses income as the result of the impossibility or difficulty in producing goods or providing services.

[2] The induction course for 24 new United Nations disaster assessment and coordination members was held by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Guatemala in April 1999.

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Economic and environmental questions: sustainable development

Measures taken in the United Nations system to accelerate progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21

Report of the Secretary-General

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Introduction

1. The General Assembly, at its fifty-third session, adopted resolution 53/188 of 15 December 1998, entitled "Implementation of and follow-up to the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly", in which the Assembly, *inter alia*, underscored the importance of continued active and collaborative involvement of all relevant bodies of the United Nations system in the implementation of Agenda 21[1] and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21,[2] and requested the Secretary-General, in close collaboration with all relevant bodies of the United Nations system and taking into account the outcome of the deliberations of the Commission on Sustainable Development, to submit to the Assembly for its consideration at future sessions, through the Economic and Social Council in view of its coordination function, an analytical report on measures taken within the United Nations system to accelerate the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, including identification of constraints and recommendations on how to address those constraints.

2. In follow-up to this request of the General Assembly, the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD), at its thirteenth meeting (New York, 8 and 9 March 1999), discussed the scope of and agreed on the modalities for preparation of such reports (see ACC/1999/1). The Committee felt that such a report would not attempt to provide a comprehensive annual assessment of United Nations system-wide activities in the field of sustainable development (since such assessments were carried out for the Commission on Sustainable Development in relation to specific themes in the Commission's agenda and also in the context of "five-year reviews"), but should rather summarize the efforts undertaken in the United Nations system to implement Agenda 21 and the outcome of the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly and highlight the main conclusions reached by IACSD and the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) that needed to be brought to the attention of member States in the Economic and Social Council and the Assembly. Consequently, it was agreed that the reports would not describe activities carried out by United Nations organizations but should focus on strategic matters related to collaboration within the United Nations system in the field of sustainable development, analyse the main challenges and constraints in that area and provide a brief update of actions required in follow-up to the work of the Commission and other intergovernmental bodies, as appropriate.

I. Work under way in the United Nations system to accelerate the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, adopted by the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session in 1997

Background

3. In November 1992, ACC established, as its standing subsidiary body, IACSD. The main goals of IACSD would be to promote cooperation and joint action within the United Nations system with a view to supporting the implementation of Agenda 21 and other outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, as well as to ensure coordinated responses from the United Nations system to the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development and other intergovernmental bodies and processes in the area of sustainable development.

4. IACSD has adopted an innovative approach to meeting these tasks through the establishment of the task managers system. Such a system, which works under the general oversight of IACSD, is based on a decentralized allocation of responsibilities for coordination, facilitating information exchange and fostering joint action to those United Nations agencies whose mandates are particularly relevant to, and that have a critical mass of in-house expertise in particular thematic areas of, Agenda 21 and which, accordingly, are best placed to act as system-wide task managers in these areas. While in most programmatic areas of Agenda 21, the role of the task manager is performed by an individual organization or agency, in those areas that cross-cut the mandates and programmes of several organizations of the United Nations system, the function of the task manager is performed by an inter-agency group. This is the case for the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, and the ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas.

5. In 1997, as part of preparations for the special session of the General Assembly which carried out a five-year assessment of progress achieved since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, IACSD undertook a critical review of the experiences gained in the United Nations system in the area of sustainable

development. The results of this work were brought to the attention of the Assembly in the statement by ACC to the Assembly at its nineteenth special session (A/S-19/6, annex). In this statement, ACC underscored that the concept of sustainable development provided an over-arching policy framework for the entire spectrum of United Nations system-wide activities at the global, regional and country levels (para. 2), and called for the implementation of interrelated policies promoting economic development, improved social equity and environmental sustainability.

6. The General Assembly at its nineteenth special session, in the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, called for strengthening of IACSD of ACC and its system of task managers, with a view to further enhancing system-wide intersectoral cooperation and coordination for the implementation of Agenda 21 and for the promotion of coordinated follow-up to the major United Nations conferences in the area of sustainable development (para. 120).

7. Analysis of ongoing work in the United Nations system aimed at accelerating progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 is contained below.

Recent developments in IACSD

8. IACSD continuously underscored the importance of effective translation of the outcomes of policy deliberations in the Commission on Sustainable Development and in other relevant intergovernmental bodies into implementation activities of the organizations of the United Nations system, including those at the regional and country levels. Accordingly, at its twelfth (September 1998) and thirteenth (March 1999) meetings, IACSD considered, in addition to several standing items in its agenda such as those related to the implementation of the decisions and recommendations of the Commission on Sustainable Development as well as preparations for the Commission's forthcoming sessions, a number of issues that were of a more long-term nature and had a direct practical bearing on strengthening the joint capacity of the United Nations system to support various global-, regional- and national-level activities aimed at further implementation of Agenda 21. These included:

(a) Developing new or rationalizing existing guidelines used by international organizations in their policy advisory services and technical cooperation, including training, and activities in support of national-level work in such areas as (i) development and implementation of national sustainable development strategies; (ii) integrated approach to land and water management; (iii) integration of sustainability concerns in national fiscal instruments; (iv) sustainable tourism; and (v) local sustainable development initiatives;

(b) Strengthening the effectiveness of the United Nations system's capacity to collect and disseminate information on sustainable development and making it more accessible to various users, particularly national Governments. This included work related to the development and application of indicators, including indicators of sustainable development, that would facilitate measuring progress towards the implementation of the integrated and coordinated follow-up of all aspects of major United Nations conferences and summits;

(c) Strengthening United Nations system coverage of waste management issues, including the elaboration of a common approach in the United Nations system in this area;

(d) Undertaking measures aimed at avoiding multiple inter-agency mechanisms of policy coordination at the global level in any given thematic area, through broadening the current system of task managers and clarifying the division of labour between the standing committees of ACC, such as IACSD and the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ), so as to ensure, on the one hand, that the results of policy discussions in IACSD would be effectively translated by CCPOQ into specific modalities of United Nations system collaboration at the country level; and, on the other, that experiences gained in the work of CCPOQ would be regularly submitted to IACSD.

Recent developments in other inter-agency processes

Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Task Force on Energy

9. In response to the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, IACSD, at its twelfth meeting in September 1998, decided to establish an Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Task Force on Energy with a view to ensuring a collaborative contribution of all relevant organizations of the United Nations system to the Commission on Sustainable Development process on energy and sustainable development. A preliminary report on the United Nations system-wide work plan on energy prepared for the ninth session of the Commission was reviewed by IACSD at its thirteenth meeting and subsequently IACSD requested the Task Force to finalize the preparation of a system-wide work plan on energy, atmosphere and transport for the period up

to 2001. The first meeting of the Task Force took place on 8 April 1999 at New York, in conjunction with the first session of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for Development.

10. Members of the Task Force agreed that activities to be undertaken were complementary and mutually supportive and that duplication of work, such as that undertaken by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,[3] should be avoided. Coordination and information-sharing are a prerequisite of the system. Members agreed that the advantages and disadvantages of energy options, the impact of energy from a social, economic and environment perspective and due consideration of the role of stakeholders, including the scientific and academic communities, should be made an integral part of the common approach. Task Force members reviewed activities currently under way and/or planned by them in preparation for the ninth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. To enhance coordination and promote synergies among these activities and to better prepare for the ninth session of the Commission, it was decided to establish an electronic network. Task Force members agreed to provide updated information on ongoing and envisioned work so that a matrix of United Nations activities geared towards the ninth session of the Commission could be established.

11. The information will also be used for reports of the Secretary-General, to be prepared in support of the preparatory process for the ninth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development and submitted for consideration by the Open-ended Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Energy and Sustainable Development, as requested by the Commission at its seventh session. The Task Force will meet again in autumn 1999. This meeting will consider the state of preparations for the first meeting of the ad hoc Open-ended Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Energy and Sustainable Development and review the first draft of the study entitled "World Energy Assessment" currently prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and the World Energy Council.

Inter-agency work in support of the implementation of the outcome of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests of the Commission on Sustainable Development and in support of the Commission's Intergovernmental Forum on Forests

12. The informal, high-level Inter-agency Task Force on Forests (ITFF) was created in 1995 to provide coherent support to the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and subsequently to the Commission's Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF), by organizations within and outside the United Nations system. ITFF has provided support to the IPF/IFF process through: secondment of staff to the Secretariat; lead agency responsibility for preparation of draft reports of the Secretary-General and background documents; cooperation with Government-led initiatives in support of the programme of work of IPF/IFF; and implementation of IPF's proposals for action addressed to international organizations. In preparation for the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, ITFF produced a joint plan for implementation of IPF's proposals for action entitled "Inter-agency partnership on forests: implementation of IPF proposals for action by the ITFF". This plan is currently being implemented to the extent possible. However, it is also being revised by ITFF in light of limited donor support. Recently, ITFF has embarked on other activities, for example, a joint multi-agency activity on forest fires, not included in the IFF mandate.

II. United Nations system response to the outcomes of the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development

Freshwater

13. In response to the main decisions of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its sixth session in the field of freshwater, the organization members of the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, at its nineteenth session (see ACC/1998/18), made the following decisions:

(a) To provide briefings to interested delegations during the annual sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development on the work of the Subcommittee in general and, in particular, on the decisions and recommendations contained in the report of its annual session. It was also decided that the annual reports of the Subcommittee would

be posted on the home page of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat on the Internet;

(b) To obtain the services of a consultant to assist the Subcommittee in reviewing its methods of work and to recommend ways in which the Subcommittee could enhance its coordination role, improve the transparency and visibility of its work and become more proactive in accelerating the implementation of chapter 18 of Agenda 21. The outcome of this exercise will be contained in a report of the Secretary-General to be submitted to the Commission at its eighth session;

(c) To begin the joint preparation of a report of the Secretary-General on progress made in providing safe water supply and sanitation for all during the 1990s, to be submitted to the Commission at its eighth session, the substantive session of 2000 of the Economic and Social Council and the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, as requested by the Assembly in its resolution 50/126 of 20 December 1995. The major aims of the report will be: (i) to provide up-to-date information on both water supply and sanitation coverage around the world, (ii) to evaluate the progress made in attaining the ultimate goal of providing safe water supply and sanitation for all, and (iii) to provide proposals for further action, particularly in developing countries and those with economies in transition;

(d) To coordinate and intensify efforts of the United Nations system at the country level, for example, efforts to reduce arsenic contamination of groundwater in Bangladesh and India;

(e) To invite the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to enhance its cooperation with the United Nations system partners in the freshwater area, including in the implementation of the Global International Waters Assessment;

(f) To begin the preparation of a periodic World Water Development Report (WWDR) — along the lines of the *Human Development Report* — the first edition of which would be published in 2002 to coincide with the 10-year review of chapter 18 of Agenda 21. A first meeting of the core group of the WWDR (New York, February 1999) drafted the corresponding terms of reference and a follow-up expert meeting will be held in mid-1999 to finalize a concrete proposal for the publication of the WWDR.

Transfer of environmentally sound technology

14. The Commission on Sustainable Development at its sixth session, in decision 6/3,[4] called for work by the United Nations system, in particular by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, UNEP, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UNDP and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), on a range of issues, including: transfer of environmentally sound technologies (ESTs); policies to promote sustainable production; national technology strategies; development of voluntary guidelines on technology partnerships; eco-efficiency; and environmental management at the enterprise level. The United Nations system is continuing and expanding existing activities and undertaking a number of new activities in accordance with that decision.

15. In 1998, UNEP and UNIDO continued development of their Cleaner Production Centres in developing countries. UNEP organized the Fifth International High-Level Seminar on Cleaner Production (Phoenix Park, Republic of Korea), which prepared an International Declaration on Cleaner Production. UNCTAD, in cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, organized an expert meeting on technology partnerships and capacity-building, and published the Advanced Technology Alert System (ATAS) XI report on that topic. UNCTAD and UNEP organized expert meetings on corporate "green" accounting and reporting. For 1999, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in cooperation with other agencies, is organizing a regional expert meeting on national cleaner technology strategies, and an expert meeting on corporate environmental accounting. UNCTAD, in cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, is preparing a publication on publicly owned technologies, drawing on the results of the 1998 expert meeting organized by the Republic of Korea. UNEP is undertaking a project to promote cleaner production investment in developing countries. UNDP, UNIDO, UNEP and other bodies are continuing to provide technical assistance to member States for the development, transfer and adaptation of environmentally sound technologies. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) and its implementing agencies (UNDP, UNEP and the World Bank) are assisting countries in the development and transfer of technologies in support of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The GEF and its implementing agencies also support developing country

clearing-house mechanism focal points of the Convention on Biological Diversity[5] with respect to implementing their national biodiversity information infrastructure. Other activities include work carried out by the International Trade Centre in close cooperation with the World Trade Organization, UNEP and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) on the implications of the World Trade Organization agreements on international trade in EST and related products. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs is preparing an inventory of United Nations system activities for the implementation of Commission on Sustainable Development decision 6/3.

Capacity-building, education and public awareness and science for sustainable development

16. At its fourth session in 1996, the Commission on Sustainable Development initiated a work programme for the implementation of chapter 36 of Agenda 21 on education, public awareness and training. An expanded version of this work programme was adopted by the Commission at its sixth session in 1998. The work programme consists of 7 subprogrammes and 23 tasks.

17. By decision of its General Conference in late 1997, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) fully integrated its support to the Commission on Sustainable Development work programme with its own programme and budget. Responsibility within UNESCO lies with the transdisciplinary project Educating for a Sustainable Future, created in 1994 as an experimental, cross-sectoral unit mandated to mobilize UNESCO's numerous educational programmes, member States and other key actors towards education for sustainable development, in the framework of the integrated follow-up to the United Nations conferences and conventions.

18. Since launching the work programme in 1996, much progress has been made in advancing a new vision of education, public awareness and training as key instruments for achieving sustainable development. UNESCO as task manager has given highest priority to clarifying the concept and content of education for sustainable development in a collective way, principally through the preparation of the document Educating for a Sustainable Future: A Transdisciplinary Vision for Concerted Action in which the entire United Nations system, the World Bank, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources — World Conservation Union (IUCN), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Organization of American States (OAS) and others participated.

19. Education, public awareness and training need to be integral components in regional, national and local strategies and plans. A survey of existing regional and national strategies and plans has been undertaken by UNESCO, in cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UNDP, to determine the extent to which education has been adequately addressed. The survey is to be published in 1999. The Education for All Assessment 2000 for basic education, being conducted by UNESCO and its partners within the follow-up to the Jomtien World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs, will provide insight to countries for the review of national policies and the reform of educational systems.

20. UNESCO has continued to develop the International Registry of Innovative Practices Promoting Education, Public Awareness and Training for Sustainability, in cooperation with the Government of the United States of America, Environment-Canada and the Canadian Man and the Biosphere Programme. The registry will provide a clearing-house mechanism consisting of nodes developed with a common protocol.

21. Efforts have been focused on implementing the articles concerning education within the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa (A/49/84/Add.2, annex, appendix II), and on creating synergies among these conventions. Since the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, UNESCO, UNEP and IUCN as well as the secretariats of the conventions have begun a number of initiatives along these lines, targeted to specific countries or regions or to specific groups or sectors of society.

22. The World Conference on Science (Budapest, 26 June–1 July 1999) organized jointly by UNESCO and the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) will pay particular attention to enhancing the role of science for sustainable development. The Conference organizers have proposed that the Science Agenda: Framework for Action to be adopted by the Conference include major action recommendations aimed at providing increased support to the further implementation of chapter 35 and the science-related components of many other chapters of Agenda 21.

Industry

23. The Commission on Sustainable Development at its sixth session called for a multi-stakeholder process to identify the key elements of a review of voluntary initiatives. Such a multi-stakeholder consultative meeting was organized with participants from business, trade unions, non-governmental organizations and selected Governments as well as representatives from UNEP and OECD in Toronto, Canada (10–12 March 1999). UNEP was a partner United Nations agency in the multi-stakeholder steering committee that led the preparations for this meeting. The report of the Toronto meeting (E/CN.17/1999/12) was prepared by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in collaboration with UNEP and UNIDO. Future follow-up in this area will involve joint or separate actions by the stakeholder groups to generate further information on the impact and effectiveness of voluntary initiatives and agreements, with assistance from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNEP, UNIDO, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and other relevant United Nations bodies, as appropriate.

III. Outcomes of the seventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development that call for action by the United Nations system

24. The Commission on Sustainable Development at its seventh session adopted a number of decisions and recommendations that call for strengthened cooperation and interaction in the United Nations system. These outcomes of the Commission will be reviewed at the forthcoming fourteenth meeting of IACSD, as well as at the next meetings of relevant inter-agency bodies with a view to agreeing on the most effective course of action. The main results of the Commission's seventh session relevant to the work of the United Nations system are outlined below.

Oceans and seas

25. The Commission on Sustainable Development at its seventh session addressed oceans and seas as its sectoral theme and adopted a comprehensive decision including recommendations for action by the United Nations system. The Commission noted that, because of the complex and interrelated nature of oceans and seas, there was a special need for international coordination and cooperation on the subject. The Commission called for a more integrated approach, building on existing arrangements, to address all legal, economic, social and environmental aspects of oceans and seas. The Commission invited the Secretary-General to undertake measures to ensure better coordination of the United Nations work on oceans and seas and to suggest initiatives to improve coordination and integration.

26. The Commission invited the Secretary-General, working in cooperation with the executive heads of organizations of the United Nations system, to undertake measures to improve the effectiveness of the ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas, including through making the work of the Subcommittee more transparent and responsive to member States.

27. The Commission expressed grave concern over the slow progress on the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (A/51/116, annex II). It welcomed the recent decision of the UNEP Governing Council (decision 20/19 B) of 5 February 1999 in which the Governing Council stressed the need for urgent measures aimed at expediting progress in the implementation of the Global Programme of Action; and reiterated its appeal to the governing bodies of relevant United Nations agencies and organizations to review their role in, and contribution to, the implementation of the Global Programme of Action. The Commission invited those organizations to provide information on progress in this area for inclusion in the annual report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly.

28. The Commission invited all organizations concerned with aspects of the oceans to consider whether their programmes of work provided sufficient consideration of the potential impact of increased climate variability, and to review what needed to be done to ensure adequate prediction and understanding of the impacts on coastal and marine areas of phenomena such as El Niño. The Commission also endorsed the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) call to action, urging implementation of complementary actions by States, intergovernmental organizations and other bodies, in particular the Convention on Biological Diversity, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

29. The Commission reiterated its call for the sponsoring organizations of the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP) to review the Group's methods of work with a view to improving its effectiveness and inclusiveness, while maintaining its status as a source of agreed, independent scientific advice. The Commission welcomed plans for an

August 1999 inter-secretariat meeting called by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), as administrative secretariat of GESAMP, to review the Group's terms of reference and modus operandi.

30. The Commission recommended that the General Assembly establish a consultative process on oceans and seas, taking into account inputs from United Nations system bodies. The Commission further suggested that the Assembly should work to strengthen the existing structures and mandates within the United Nations system in this area. The results of the Commission's review of oceans and seas will be considered by the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.

Tourism and sustainable development

31. The Commission adopted an international work programme on sustainable tourism development calling for a variety of activities to be undertaken by Governments, the tourism industry, other major groups and international organizations. The Commission urged Governments to support initiatives of organizations like ILO and the World Health Organization (WHO) that would contribute to sustainable tourism.

32. The Commission called on Governments, major groups and the United Nations system, in close collaboration with the World Tourism Organization, and building on work by UNEP, UNESCO, UNCTAD, ILO and UNDP, and in accordance with the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States,[6] to consider a number of initiatives and to keep the Commission on Sustainable Development informed on progress achieved.

33. The Commission called for development of sustainable tourism to increase benefits for host communities and maintain their cultural and environmental integrity and for efforts to encourage more responsible behaviour among tourists. The Commission called for activities in support of the International Year of Ecotourism, the International Year of Mountains and the International Coral Reef Initiative.

34. The Commission called for assessment of voluntary initiatives and guidelines relating to sustainable tourism, and for cooperation with UNEP in developing guiding principles for sustainable tourism development. Consideration should also be given to establishing a global information network on sustainable tourism, taking into account the work of the World Tourism Organization, regional mechanisms and major groups.

35. The Commission invited the World Tourism Organization to consider the participation of major groups in the development of its global code of ethics for tourism. The Commission invited IMO and other agencies to evaluate whether existing regulations and compliance on marine pollution were sufficient to protect fragile coastal zones. The Commission invited the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to further consider existing knowledge and best practice on sustainable tourism and biological diversity with a view to contributing to international guidelines for activities related to sustainable tourism development in vulnerable ecosystems and habitats.

36. The Commission invited the United Nations Secretariat and the World Tourism Organization, in consultation with major groups and other international organizations, to facilitate the establishment of a working group on tourism to assess financial leakages and determine how to maximize benefits for indigenous and local communities, and to prepare a joint initiative to improve information availability and capacity-building.

Consumption and production patterns

37. The Commission at its seventh session reaffirmed that the principal goals of changing consumption and production patterns should be pursued by all countries, with the developed countries taking the lead. The Commission noted that the overriding issues of poverty eradication and changing consumption and production patterns should be addressed in the context of the consideration of agriculture, financial resources, trade and investment in 2000, and energy and transport in 2001.

38. The Commission decided that activities under the Commission's existing international work programme on sustainable consumption and production patterns should continue, and that consideration should be given to four new priority areas: (a) effective policy development and implementation; (b) natural resource management and cleaner production; (c) globalization and its impacts on consumption and production patterns; and (d) urbanization and its impacts on consumption and production patterns.

39. In the area of natural resource management and cleaner production, the Commission called for efforts to promote public and private investments in cleaner production, eco-efficiency and the sustainable use of natural resources, taking into account the work of the World Tourism Organization. The Commission called on UNEP and UNIDO, through their Cleaner Production Centres, to

enhance their support to enterprises in developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

40. The Commission called for studies of the impacts of globalization, including trade, investment and the role of the financial sector in promoting sustainable consumption and production. In the area of urbanization, the Commission called for work on urban energy, transport, water, sanitation, waste management, public health, and city planning and management, with particular reference to the work of the Commission on Human Settlements.

IV. Constraints faced by the United Nations system in the field of sustainable development and recommendations on how to address these constraints

41. Additional tasks such as those implied in many decisions of the Commission on Sustainable Development cannot be implemented fully by individual United Nations agencies without additional resources. For example, no additional resources have been provided for the Commission work programme on education, public awareness and training for sustainable development. UNESCO, as task manager for this work programme — which spans not only the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development but all of the major United Nations conferences — has not had recourse to additional resources to reinforce its capacity to further this work programme. Along the same lines, there exists the need for necessary financial and human resources to implement the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA), as was recently recognized by the Governing Council of UNEP. Governments and respective governing and budgetary bodies should be encouraged to work together to provide the resources to implement their decisions particularly at the outset. Similarly, as reported in paragraph 12 above, limited donor support led to a number of serious difficulties in the implementation by organizations forming the Inter-agency Task Force on Forests of proposals for action adopted by the Commission's Intergovernmental Panel on Forests.

42. Other constraints for the United Nations system are related to the lack of institutional capacity, vague mandates and roles, and lack of clearly defined priorities, both for individual organizations and for the United Nations system as a whole, as sometimes determined by intergovernmental decisions. The United Nations system is attempting to address these issues through various inter-agency consultative processes and consultations, the results of which often need to be reported back to respective governing bodies in order that clearer guidance may be solicited. Organizations of the United Nations system are also undertaking steps towards streamlining sometimes lengthy and bureaucratic procedures, and promoting better managerial practices and greater motivation of staff. Such measures could go a long way towards helping agencies to address their responsibilities in a more efficient and effective way.

43. There is often a perception that the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and other United Nations conferences is primarily the responsibility of the United Nations system in general, and of task managers in particular. It needs to be emphasized that actions need to take place primarily at national level, with Governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and others as the main actors. The role of the United Nations system is, *inter alia*, to facilitate cooperation among major actors to enhance action at national level.

44. Some of the constraints are related to inconsistent decisions in various governing bodies of organizations of the United Nations system. As noted in section III above, a matter of considerable concern to Governments meeting in the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Governing Council of UNEP and elsewhere has been the slow rate of progress in implementing the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA). While States are responsible for the overall implementation of the Global Programme of Action at the national and, as appropriate, regional and global levels, with respect to the clearing-house mechanism (that is to say, a referral system providing access to current sources of information, practical experiences, and scientific and technical expertise, as well as possible funding sources), United Nations agencies and organizations are expected to take lead responsibility for a number of specific pollutant source categories, as defined in General Assembly resolution 51/189 of 16 December 1996. The development of the clearing house has been hindered, however, by the fact that the governing bodies of only three agencies (WHO), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and UNESCO/ Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) have adopted resolutions in support of the Global Programme of Action, and WHO, IMO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) have indicated they would be unable to take the lead agency role for their respective source categories without additional financial

resources. On the other hand, it should be noted that, in addition to responsibilities defined for these by Assembly resolution 51/189, IAEA, UNESCO/IOC and UNEP have joined forces in an active inter-agency programme on marine pollution, providing data quality assurance services to regional programmes and national laboratories. Governments are therefore urged to follow up their agreement, as contained in Assembly resolution 51/189, UNEP Governing Council decisions 19/14 A of 7 February 1997[7] and 20/19 B, and in the decisions of the fourth and seventh sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development, to take the necessary action within the governing bodies of relevant United Nations agencies and organizations to ensure that these organizations have the mandate for, and give appropriate priority to, the implementation of the Global Programme of Action.

45. A number of specific difficulties are related to fostering progress in some intersectoral aspects of sustainable development, such as health. Health is too often understood only in terms of medical services and as the responsibility of the Ministry of Health. At the country level, government health services have been cut back in many countries in the context of economic reforms, including structural adjustment. Health sector reforms have focused on ensuring financial viability of health-care services, often resulting in a neglect of public and environmental health. The United Nations system needs to address health issues, particularly those related to preventive health, in relation to sustainable development. Health professionals need to be better informed of the linkages between health and development, and professionals in other sectors need to be informed of the relationship between their sectoral issues and health. Consideration of health issues needs to be strengthened in sustainable development planning, in particular through impact assessment. WHO working in close collaboration with other United Nations agencies is undertaking activities to improve understanding of the links between health and various development activities, as well as global issues such as the health impacts of climate change, and development issues such as natural resource management and land-use changes.

46. Finally, a more coordinated approach to the follow-up of all recent major United Nations conferences is needed in order to achieve synergies and to ensure a more efficient and effective use of limited resources. This requires greater efforts, taking fully into account the outcomes of relevant deliberations in the Economic and Social Council, aimed at promoting more effective coordination of both policy development and implementation activities at all levels: in the United Nations system, within national Governments and among various non-governmental constituencies involved in this work. As for the United Nations system, ACC, upon recommendations of ACC, has started a process aimed at expanding the task managers' system with a view to avoiding multiple inter-agency mechanisms of policy coordination at the global level. Among the goals of this endeavour is to consider effective ways of broadening the task managers' role from that of servicing and carrying out the mandates related to United Nations Conference on Environment and Development follow-up to one encompassing responsibility for facilitating overall collaboration in respective thematic areas on a system-wide basis, and incorporating in their work the mandates of other major conferences together with those of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

Notes

[1] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3–14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.

[2] General Assembly resolution S-19/2 of 28 June 1997, annex.

[3] A/AC.237/18 (Part II)/Add.1 and Corr.1, annex I.

[4] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1998, Supplement No. 9* (E/1998/29), chap. I, sect. B, decision 6/3.

[5] United Nations Environment Programme, *Convention on Biological Diversity* (Environmental Law and Institution Programme Activity Centre), June 1992.

[6] *Report of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Bridgetown, Barbados, 25 April–6 May 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.I.18 and corrigenda), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[7] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 25* (A/52/25), annex, decision 19/14 A.

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Activities of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report on achievements in the implementation of the programme of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction is submitted to the Economic and Social Council in pursuance of General Assembly resolutions 44/236, 49/22 A, 50/117 A and 53/185. Together with the reports of the Secretary-General on recommendations on institutional arrangements for disaster reduction activities of the United Nations system after the conclusion of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (A/54/136–E/1999/89) and on international cooperation to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon (A/54/135–E/1999/88), also requested in Assembly resolution 53/185, the present report is intended to facilitate the Council's deliberations on the arrangements for natural disaster reduction activities within the United Nations system after the conclusion of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction.

* A/54/150.

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I. Introduction

1. Faced with an increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters throughout the world in the late 1980s, the General Assembly, in its resolution 42/169 of 11 December 1987, decided to designate the 1990s as a decade in which the international community, under the auspices of the United Nations, would pay special attention to fostering international cooperation in the field of natural disaster reduction. The Assembly also decided, in paragraph 4 of the same resolution, that the overall objective of the decade would be to reduce through concerted international actions, especially in developing countries, loss of life, property damage and the social and economic disruption caused by natural disasters, such as earthquakes, windstorms (cyclones, hurricanes, tornadoes, typhoons), tsunamis, floods, landslides, volcanic eruptions, wildfires and other calamities of natural origin, such as grasshopper and locust infestations.

2. In pursuance of that decision by the General Assembly, the Secretary-General appointed an international ad hoc group of experts, composed of representatives of the various scientific and technical disciplines pertaining to disaster prevention and mitigation, to help him to develop a framework and specifically to identify priority areas for application of the then existing knowledge, to identify gaps in that respect, and to provide recommendations concerning matters of implementation. In its report to the Secretary-General, the group of experts stated, *inter alia*,

(a) That in view of growing vulnerability to natural hazards and the increasing risk of still greater tragedies caused by natural disasters, the issue had to be confronted head-on;

(b) That most of the world was viewing natural disasters with fatalism, an attitude that was wrong and needed to be changed;

(c) That societies, communities and individuals, prepared through education, training, policy and legislation, and investment, could be both disaster-resistant and resilient;

(d) That the proposed Decade was both a moral imperative and an opportunity for the world community, in a spirit of global cooperation, to use existing scientific and technical knowledge to alleviate human suffering and enhance economic security;

(e) That the historical piecemeal approach to natural disasters needed to be replaced with an integrated approach — one that would cut across natural hazards and would include planning, preparedness, prevention, warnings, relief and rehabilitation, and that a broader appreciation of the positive relationship between disaster reduction and economic and social development goals was required.

3. In its resolution 44/236, the General Assembly formally proclaimed the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR). The annex to that resolution contained the International Framework of Action for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. The General Assembly thus established both a clearly structured functional platform and institutional base, as well as a 10-year programme of action, guided by the overall objective as mentioned above, and built around the following main goals:

(a) To improve the capacity of each country to mitigate the effects of natural disasters expeditiously and effectively, paying special attention to assisting developing countries in the assessment of disaster damage potential and in the establishment of early warning systems and disaster-resistant structures, when and where needed;

(b) To devise appropriate guidelines and strategies for applying existing scientific and technical knowledge, taking into account the cultural and economic diversity among nations;

(c) To foster scientific and engineering endeavours aimed at closing critical gaps in knowledge in order to reduce loss of life and property;

(d) To disseminate existing and new information related to measures for the assessment, prediction and mitigation of natural disasters;

(e) To develop measures for the assessment, prediction, prevention and mitigation of natural disasters through programmes of technical assistance and technology transfer, demonstration projects, and education and training, tailored to specific disasters and locations, and to evaluate the effectiveness of such programmes.

4. In its section B, the International Framework of Action identified, *inter alia*, policy measures to be taken at the national level. These included contributing to concerted international action for the reduction of natural disasters and, as appropriate, the establishment of multisectoral and interdisciplinary national committees with a view to attaining the objective and goals of the Decade. Also at the national level, scientific and technological institutions, financial institutions, including banks and insurance companies, as well as industrial enterprises, foundations and other non-governmental organizations, were encouraged to support and participate fully in the programmes and activities of the Decade.

5. In section D of the International Framework of Action, the Secretary-General was requested to establish a Special High-level Council, composed of a limited number of internationally prominent persons, to promote public awareness and mobilize public and private support for the reduction of disaster vulnerability at all levels. The Secretary-General was also requested to create a Scientific and Technical Committee, of 20 to 25 experts selected in consultation with their Governments, to develop overall programmes to be taken into account in bilateral and multilateral cooperation for the Decade, paying attention to priorities and gaps in technical knowledge identified at the national levels (for an assessment of the work of the Committee, see A/54/132/Add.1–E/1999/80/Add.1).

6. At its inaugural session, the Committee adopted three key targets in complement to the Decade's goals and overall objective as reflected above. These were subsequently endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 46/149. Thereby, IDNDR's implementation was to ensure that by the year 2000 and as part of their plans to achieve sustainable development, all countries would have in place:

(a) Comprehensive national assessments of risks from natural disasters integrated into development plans;

(b) Mitigation plans of practical measures for application at the national and local levels to address long-term disaster prevention, preparedness and community awareness;

(c) Ready access to global, regional and local early warning systems.

7. In line with the proposals for the International Framework of Action, the secretariat of the Decade was established at the United Nations Office at Geneva, in close association with the former Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO). The secretariat was charged with a twofold responsibility — (a) to provide substantive and secretarial support to the partners within the International Framework of Action, especially the Special High-level Council and the Scientific and Technical Committee, as well as for other related activities, and (b) to execute the day-to-day coordination of Decade activities. Since 1992 and in the wake of General Assembly resolution 46/182, the implementation of the Decade has been placed under the authority of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, to whom the Director of the IDNDR secretariat reports directly. Within this humanitarian authority, the secretariat works closely with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs both in New York and at Geneva.

8. As it was recommended that extrabudgetary resources be provided by Governments, international organizations and other sources to meet the financial requirements of the Decade, a trust fund was established under the administration of the Secretary-General. Since its inception, the IDNDR Trust Fund has received voluntary contributions in the amount of US$ 20,500,000 overall. To date, the accumulated expenditure, obligations, and commitments amount to US$ 20,200,000. The five major donors share 81 per cent of overall contributions over time, and represent the pillar of financial partnership and continuity without which the implementation of IDNDR would not have been possible. The Government of Japan alone provided 38.5 per cent of total support, followed by Germany, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Italy. Within the United Nations programme budget, the IDNDR Trust Fund is contained in section 25 (Humanitarian assistance), subprogramme 3 (Natural disaster reduction). In the biennium 1998–1999, IDNDR's proposed budget represents 6.8 per cent of the overall projection for section 25; in the proposed budget for the biennium 2000–2001, this has decreased to a level of 1.9 per cent (see A/54/6 (Sect. 25), table 25.1).

9. In order to coordinate the many tasks given to the United Nations system both within the Decade's preparatory process and specifically following the IDNDR founding resolution, a United Nations Steering Committee was established. In view of the crucial role played by intergovernmental organizations and other institutions outside the United Nations system, the original United Nations Steering Committee has meanwhile evolved into the current Inter-Agency Steering Committee for the Decade, with broad multisectoral membership, including intergovernmental mechanisms and organizations in all regions and interregional platforms for cooperation; NGOs from the social and economic domains at the international, regional, national and community levels; and scientific institutions and national committees. In 1994, the inter-agency mechanism was complemented by an informal, open-ended contact group of permanent missions at Geneva to act as a platform for the harmonization of national actions within the context of the Decade, and to provide feedback to the national committees and focal points.

10. The Decade was primarily established to promote disaster reduction as a multisectoral and interdisciplinary activity, comprising a wide variety of interrelated fields at the local, national, regional and international levels. Without interfering with the operational tasks of its partner agencies, the Decade's role was to promote the concept of natural disaster reduction as a strategic principle for the reduction of loss of life and property, as well as the social and

economic disruption resulting from natural disasters. With the creation of the Decade, the United Nations system introduced disaster reduction as an ongoing activity within the overall strategic process in support of sustainable development, engaging communities at risk in the conscious management of natural hazards well beyond (and more cost-effectively than) traditional contingency planning and disaster response.

11. As part of the Decade's overall programme of action, a wide range of work areas was identified in close consultation with the Special High-level Council, the Scientific and Technical Committee, and the Inter-Agency Steering Committee. During the life of the Decade, disaster reduction principles in these areas have been fruitfully applied under the operational responsibility of national Governments and partner agencies, both inside and outside the United Nations system. Examples of areas covered include:

(a) Comprehensive research activities for a better understanding of natural hazards and how their effects may be better addressed;

(b) Application of scientific knowledge and technology for disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation, including the transfer of experience and greater access to relevant data;

(c) Structural measures to strengthen disaster resilience of human settlements and public infrastructure, and to contain the potential impacts of natural phenomena on socio-economic systems, based on risk assessment and risk mapping;

(d) Advocacy and sustained programmes of public information about natural hazards, vulnerabilities and risk, including formal education and professional training;

(e) Establishing public policy commitment on disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation, and adopting relevant legislation at both the national and local levels of administration;

(f) Integration of disaster prevention into national planning, including the establishment of effective risk management capacities, and disaster relief;

(g) Measures of (land use) planning which are based on hazard awareness, vulnerability analysis and risk assessment, with the participatory involvement of local authorities;

(h) Measures of decentralization of operational responsibilities and budgetary resources for risk management which will empower local communities to a greater degree of self-reliance, while improving their resilience to natural disasters.

II. Mid-term review

A. 1994 World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction

12. The General Assembly, in its resolution 46/149, endorsed the recommendation of the Scientific and Technical Committee to convene the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction in 1994 to serve as a substantive platform for the mid-term review of the Decade, undertaken by the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1994.

13. The Government of Japan generously hosted the Conference at Yokohama City from 23 to 27 May 1994. A key element of the Conference was a review of progress achieved towards the targets in disaster reduction to be reached by each country by the year 2000, as listed in section I above. Other objectives were to chart a programme of action for the future; exchange information on the implementation of the Decade programmes and activities; and increase the awareness of the importance of disaster reduction policies.

14. The Conference was successful in all respects. It brought together more than 2,000 participants from 149 member States, the United Nations system and all relevant partners within the IDNDR Framework of Action. Many delegations were represented at the ministerial level. Voluntary contributions from a broad spectrum of donors enabled multisectoral representation from most of the developing countries. The Conference produced the following important policy statements: the Yokohama Message and the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World: Guidelines for Natural Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Mitigation. These were submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session in the report and recommendations of the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction (see A/CONF.172/9), together with the Secretary-General's report on the Decade's mid-term review undertaken by the Council (A/49/453). The General Assembly subsequently endorsed both documents in its resolution 49/22 A.

15. The Yokohama Conference was a milestone event and a turning point in the IDNDR process, inasmuch as it heralded the introduction of new strategies for the second half of the Decade. These new strategies, as reflected in the

wording of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World, were characterized, *inter alia*, by the following:

(a) *Emphasis on social sciences*. The international scientific community had spearheaded the initiative for a greater reliance on science and technology in the late 1980s, thus ensuring the scientific underpinning of the Decade from its earliest beginnings. The Yokohama Conference widened this vision to include a greater emphasis on social sciences in research, policy development and implementation. Economics, the media and information networks and vulnerability reduction featured among the new disaster reduction issues to be further explored in the second half of the Decade;

(b) *Focus on public policy*. After the Yokohama Conference, many countries adopted new legislation and national strategies for disaster reduction;

(c) *Development of regional and subregional approaches*. As countries conducted a national review process for Yokohama and shared the review process with neighbouring countries, regional approaches emerged as a significant outcome. Regional networking for information exchange and technical cooperation has since then become a priority concern amongst the Decade's partner organizations;

(d) *Shift from emergency preparedness to the reduction of vulnerability and risk*. During the early part of the Decade, emphasis in disaster reduction was still placed to a large extent on emergency preparedness. From different policy and operational perspectives, the Yokohama Conference strongly underscored the links between disaster reduction and sustainable development. Reinforced by the mid-term review, natural disaster reduction has since become part of the United Nations system strategy in support of sustainable development, natural resource protection and sound environmental management. Disaster reduction remains an indispensable component of humanitarian assistance, response and rehabilitation;

(e) *Emphasis on concrete application of science and technology to disaster reduction*. Both the process leading up to the Yokohama Conference as well as the discussions at the Conference itself generated awareness and commitment to the intensification of the application of natural disaster reduction approaches within the national development planning process. Particular emphasis was placed on the interface between science and technology on the one hand and plan implementation on the other. The involvement of local communities was identified as a crucial factor.

16. At the same time, the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction recognized some distinct gaps in the implementation of IDNDR, notwithstanding achievements in the domains of training, technical applications and research at the local, national and international levels and in regional cooperation. In its assessment of the status of disaster reduction midway into the Decade, the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World noted, *inter alia*, that:

(a) Awareness of the potential benefits of disaster reduction was still limited to specialized circles and had not yet been successfully communicated to all sectors of society;

(b) A number of positive results had been achieved only unevenly and not in the concerted and systematic way envisaged by the General Assembly;

(c) Not all entities of the United Nations system had contributed to the Decade's implementation to the extent possible, and during the first half of the 1990s emphasis had again been placed primarily on disaster response, which had slowed down the momentum of IDNDR's initial phase.

In the words of the Yokohama Message, as adopted by the World Conference, the Yokohama Conference was at a crossroads in human progress. In one direction lay the meagre results of an extraordinary opportunity given to the United Nations and its Member States. In the other direction, the United Nations and the world community could change the course of events by reducing the suffering from natural disasters. Action was urgently needed.

17. The IDNDR secretariat and its key partners within the International Framework of Action accepted this challenge and engaged in a structured and concerted approach towards the Yokohama follow-up, taking in the evolved strategic orientation described in paragraph 15 above and striving towards further improved interface with all relevant United Nations system sectors, as described below.

B. Strategic synergies within the social and economic domains of the United Nations system

18. As part of the follow-up to the Yokohama Conference, the Decade secretariat established a number of new, visible, synergies between its internationally recognized approach to disaster reduction and several other global strategies of the United Nations system in the social and economic fields. Examples of such synergies include the following:

(a) The *United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)* (Istanbul, 3–14 June, 1996) included

distinct references to IDNDR and a chapter on disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness, and post-disaster rehabilitation capabilities in the Habitat Agenda;

(b) The *World Food Summit* (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Rome, 13–17 November 1996) included distinct references to natural disaster reduction in both the Rome Declaration on World Food Security and in the World Food Summit Plan of Action. The latter dedicated its fifth commitment to the prevention and preparedness for natural disasters and man-made emergencies;

(c) The *Commission on Sustainable Development* at its fourth session considered natural disaster reduction and IDNDR within the context of implementing the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, adopted at Bridgetown, Barbados, in 1992. In the same vein, disaster reduction is an integral component of the preparations for the special session of the General Assembly on the review of the implementation of that Programme of Action to be held in fall 1999;

(d) The *Declaration on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations* (General Assembly resolution 50/6) refers, *inter alia*, to the need for intensified cooperation on natural disaster reduction in order to foster sustained economic growth, social development, environmental protection and social justice;

(e) The *Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21*, as adopted at the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly (New York, 23–27 June 1997), included specific reference to natural disaster reduction and the Yokohama World Conference;

(f) At its first regular session of 1998, the *Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC)* recognized disaster reduction as an issue of global concern and of strategic importance for the United Nations system in the twenty-first century (see ACC/1998/4);

(g) At the *high-level segment of the Substantive session of 1995 of the Economic and Social Council*, dedicated to the *development of Africa*, it was recognized that Africa is one of the continents prone to natural disasters which adversely affect development efforts, and that programmes for disaster preparedness, prevention and mitigation, in accordance with the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World and its Programme of Action, should be instituted to assist Africa to cope with the effects of natural disasters (see E/1995/117).

C. Early warning capacities of the United Nations system with regard to natural disasters

19. In recognition of early warning being one of IDNDR's three programme targets (see para. 6 above), a specific technical committee session was devoted to the subject at the Yokohama World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction. The primary outcome of the Conference re-emphasized the importance of applied scientific knowledge and the public's awareness of hazard risks as essential components for more effective early warning practices.

20. Subsequently, at its forty-ninth session, the General Assembly called for improvements and better coordination of early warning capacities within the United Nations system with regard to natural disasters and similar disasters with an adverse effect on the environment. The General Assembly, in its resolution 49/22 B, placed this initiative distinctly within the concerted efforts of implementing the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action, and thus within the framework of IDNDR. The IDNDR secretariat was requested to coordinate a review of the existing early warning programmes and to suggest means by which global practices could become better coordinated and made more effective.

21. In pursuance of Assembly resolution 49/22 B, the Secretary-General presented two reports to the General Assembly (A/50/526 and A/52/561), which contained, *inter alia*, the findings of six international expert working groups convened by the IDNDR secretariat to study different aspects of the early warning process: geological hazards; hydrometeorological hazards, including drought, fire and other environmental hazards; technological hazards; the use and transfer of related modern technologies; and national and local capabilities pertinent to the effective use of early warning.

22. All aspects of early warning for natural and similar disasters were discussed by an international conference on early warning systems for the reduction of natural disasters held at Potsdam, Germany, in September 1998. This technical and scientific conference focused on the application of successful warning practices, and was sponsored by the Government of Germany with the collaboration of United Nations agencies and international scientific organizations. As a major topical event of the IDNDR closing process and the consolidation of global views, the conference identified those accomplishments and local experiences which can best improve organizational relationships and practical effectiveness for early warning into the twenty-first century. A primary output of the

follow-up to the Potsdam conference will be a specific action plan and guidelines towards an integrated process approach, interdisciplinary and multisectoral, thereby comprising sociological, economical, political, organizational, scientific and technological components.

III. Disaster reduction and United Nations reform

23. The preventive concept as embodied in IDNDR has received a considerable boost through the United Nations reform, one of the main reform messages being the shift towards a multilateral platform which would enable the international community to deal with the challenges of the future — and the risks of the future — in a proactive and effective manner. With regard to natural disaster reduction, the Secretary-General's reform proposals and the subsequent decisions of the General Assembly have confirmed:

(a) The uniqueness of the United Nations system as policy and coordination platform for issues of universal character, as well as its capacity to serve as an honest broker for all relevant interests and its fundamental commitment to creating equal opportunities in all domains;

(b) The positive impulses for pursuing cross-cutting issues of universal character, such as natural disaster reduction, created on the one hand by a division of labour between non-operational responsibilities for system-wide policy development, advocacy and coordination, and on the other hand, by distinct operational responsibilities for all relevant mandate bearers inside and outside the United Nations, in particular in the field of development.

24. Consequently, in its resolution 52/12 B, the General Assembly decided to transfer to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) the responsibility for the coordination of operational activities for natural disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness. At the same time, activities relating to the implementation of IDNDR remained the responsibility of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator (see A/52/303, sect. 25.6).

IV. Towards the twenty-first century

A. IDNDR action plan 1998–1999

25. A summary of the achievements of the Decade is contained in the final report of its Scientific and Technical Committee (A/54/132/Add.1–E/1999/80/Add.1). In the present section attention is drawn to information not specifically covered in that report.

26. In order to evaluate progress in disaster reduction made by the Decade, identify trends in natural hazards likely to project related risks into the twenty-first century, and shape future directions for sustained international and interdisciplinary commitment to disaster reduction, IDNDR launched a 1998–1999 plan of action at the end of 1997. Based on programme areas defined by the Scientific and Technical Committee and implemented through thematic and regional meetings, the plan of action was focused on concrete goals in the fields of (a) continued advocacy, (b) development of policies, and (c) coordination of institutional capacities. The action plan thus formed a strategic framework for follow-up to the Yokohama World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, and the development of a vision for the future of disaster reduction.

1. Advocacy

27. In order to ensure the necessary awareness-building for disaster reduction as well as to work towards building a culture of prevention, in the IDNDR founding resolution in 1989, an annual "World Disaster Reduction Day" was designated, to be observed by the whole United Nations system on the second Wednesday of October. With financial support from the United Kingdom since 1992, the Day has grown into an important recurrent platform for massive thematic information exchange and programme guidance for all IDNDR partner agencies and the disaster reduction stakeholder community outside the United Nations System. An annual six-monthly campaign, orchestrated at the global level but implemented in almost 100 countries, is based on the selection of a broad theme. For example, in 1998 it was "Natural disaster prevention and the media: prevention begins with information". Part of this campaign since 1996, the IDNDR Internet conference in 1999 attracted 700 participants from 60 countries.

28. *STOP Disasters*, a quarterly magazine devoted to disaster prevention started by the IDNDR secretariat, is published by the international institute Stop Disasters at Naples, Italy, with a readership of 11,000 subscribers in 205 countries and territories. The IDNDR secretariat also produces *IDNDR Informs*, a newsletter for Latin America and the Caribbean. The latest IDNDR innovation in advocacy is the IDNDR Web site launched in the early part of 1999 (*http://www.idndr.org*), which provides information on the Decade to a growing number of visitors and contains

links to agencies in the wider disaster reduction constituency. Monthly highlights are posted on this site.

2. Policy development

29. A major aspect of IDNDR's functions in policy development in the plan of action 1998–1999 was to coordinate the Inter-Agency Task Force on El Niño, as called for by the General Assembly in its resolution 52/200. This Task Force presented a multidisciplinary platform for concerted action among partner agencies within the United Nations system, in particular for the linking of science and technology concerns (i.e., those manifest in the programmes of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and its Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), etc.) with the operational concerns (i.e., as present in such bodies as UNDP, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Food Programme (WFP), FAO, the World Health Organization (WHO)/the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, etc.). Immediate "products" included the first intergovernmental meeting of experts on El Niño (Guayaquil, Ecuador, November 1998) and the Declaration of Guayaquil, a WMO scientific and technical retrospective of the 1997–1998 El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) event, a WMO feasibility study on a centre for the study of the El Niño phenomenon as proposed by the Government of Ecuador, and a newly initiated multi-country UNEP case study on data management and national responses to the 1997–1998 ENSO event, finance by the United Nations International Partnership Trust Fund (UNFIP) and other funding sources (currently encompassing 16 countries).

30. Another IDNDR policy focus of great importance was early warning, a field of growing importance thanks to rapid technological progress in related areas. Two General Assembly resolutions and a thorough inter-agency process of consultation led to an international conference on early warning systems for the reduction of natural disasters, held at Potsdam, Germany, in September 1998 (for more information on the Potsdam conference, see para. 22 above).

31. As an example of the remaining policy development issues addressed by the 1998–1999 plan of action, the IDNDR secretariat embarked on an activity to define policy guidelines for seismic damage reduction in urban centres, through case studies in nine cities within the framework of the risk assessment tools for diagnosis of urban areas against seismic disasters (RADIUS) initiative. Working through three regional advisory committees, the cities were able to bring public officials together with scientists in order to establish specific damage scenarios and define remedial actions for these accordingly. A total of 93 associated cities are participating in the programme, which should help to take protective measures against the damage caused by earthquakes.

3. Coordination

32. As part of 1998–1999 plan of action, IDNDR held 21 thematic and 10 regional conferences and other events, which focused on a wide variety of disaster reduction issues common to groups of stakeholders or groups of countries. All of these meetings in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries and elsewhere, were very well attended by stakeholders at different levels. Key problems were identified at the regional or subregional levels and recommendations for future actions made. The meetings produced a wealth of evidence in support of disaster reduction as an integral part of disaster management. They also provided extensive information on country-level experience. All these activities culminated in a high-level event at Geneva in July 1999, comprising the IDNDR programme forum (see paras. 63–90 below) and the substantive session of 1999 of the Economic and Social Council, to which the present report is submitted.

B. Selected activities at the regional level

33. As the Decade proceeded, its objectives gained increasing recognition at the regional and national levels, as witnessed, *inter alia*, by the steadily growing numbers of Member States with IDNDR national committees or focal points (currently 141; for a listing, please visit the IDNDR Web site at *http://www.idndr.org*), and the gradual policy shift from response and recovery to reduction and preparedness in the disaster management plans of most of these countries. In order to allow the preparation of the present section of the report, the Secretary-General sent a note verbale to all Governments on 15 March 1999, requesting country-level reports on achievements in the implementation of the IDNDR programme. A timely response was received from Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Ecuador, France, Germany, Norway, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Slovakia, South Africa and Venezuela. Fortunately, additional information made available to the IDNDR secretariat by over 80 countries was varied in terms of geographic coverage as well as depth of detail. For the benefit of the Council, a typical cross-section,

derived from all this material, is presented below. These limited examples are provided without prejudice to the numerous other developments that have also highlighted the Decade.

1. Africa

34. The African continent is subject to a wide range of natural hazards, and suffers constantly from natural and other disasters, which have serious adverse effects on societies and national economies as well as on scarce human and material resources. Strong political support for disaster reduction was demonstrated by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Council of Ministers, which formally adopted the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action in July 1994 as the common basis to guide progress towards disaster reduction on the continent.

35. Because of lack of available resources, the translation of this political will into effective action is progressing more slowly than desired by most national agencies responsible. In this connection, the declaration adopted by an IDNDR/UNEP regional meeting for Africa, held at Nairobi in May 1999, recommended that cooperation among African countries in the domain of disaster prevention and risk reduction be strengthened by adopting national and regional mechanisms to improve the exchange of information, sharing of experience and knowledge, and technology transfer.

36. During the Decade, three subregional workshops were held in Africa in order to start the process of transforming the conclusions of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action into practice at the country level — at Gaborone in November–December 1994; at Ouagadougou in May 1995 and at Nairobi in June 1995. Advanced disaster reduction structures and/or legislation have now been put in place in a number of countries, including Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Federal Republic of Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. A large number of national IDNDR committees has also been put in place. Considering their advanced stage of preparations, quite a number of additional countries in Africa may be expected to have such instruments in place in the near future.

2. Europe

37. The European region is subject to potentially dangerous natural hazards, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, flash floods, landslides, avalanches and forest fires. Technological and human-induced ecological hazards, such as accidental releases of chemicals in surface water catchments, dumping of toxic and radioactive materials in coastal zones or on the high seas, and hydrological and climatic problems created by excessive withdrawals from large water bodies etc. add to or complicate problems related to natural hazards, particularly in CIS countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. An IDNDR/CIS regional meeting held in Armenia in September 1998 addressed issues of particular relevance to CIS countries.

38. Support for the principles of disaster reduction is evidenced by the number of European countries with IDNDR national committees or focal points. Among these, France was one of the first Member States to establish an IDNDR national committee by official ministerial decree (in 1990), and the Swiss IDNDR national committee has been mandated to continue beyond the conclusion of IDNDR at the end of 1999 as the Swiss national platform on natural hazards. An IDNDR-sponsored international conference on mountain natural hazards was held at Grenoble, France, in April 1999, and an IDNDR regional meeting for the Mediterranean area at Valencia, Spain, in May 1999. A major IDNDR meeting on land-use planning and disasters was hosted at Paris in June 1999.

3. Asia and Oceania

39. Natural hazards in Asia include floods, droughts, storm surges, tsunamis, earthquakes, landslides and volcanic eruptions. In recent years, the occurrence and severity of some natural disasters in Asia and Oceania has become more clearly associated with the ENSO phenomenon. Several regional activities in Asia and Oceania manifested a strong focus on disaster prevention. In fact, collaboration in the area of ENSO monitoring between Australia, China, Japan and other countries in the region, with inputs from major partner countries on the Eastern Pacific rim, has greatly enhanced the understanding of the phenomenon and improved skills for El Niño predictions over the past 10 years.

40. Seven annual South Pacific IDNDR disaster management meetings have been held during the Decade to strengthen collaboration and harmonize data collection on natural hazards. Held at Bangkok in February 1999 and organized in close collaboration with the Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), an IDNDR regional conference for Asia enabled a massive exchange of experiences and ideas.

41. In China, for example, the IDNDR national committee is set up as an inter-ministerial working group, responsible for the formulation of national policy and action plans for IDNDR activities in China. In April 1998, the Chinese national disaster reduction plan (1998–2010) was approved

by the State Council and made an integral part of the overall national economic and social development plan. The importance attached to disaster reduction by China is well illustrated in an excerpt from a recent speech by President Jiang Zemin (see box).

42. In Japan, the disaster prevention bureau of the national land agency coordinates the activities of Government, the ministries, agencies and institutions in order to ensure that the Japanese Government is able to carry out disaster reduction activities in an integrated and coherent manner.

43. Viet Nam, a country exposed to recurring floods and typhoons, has strongly supported the goals of IDNDR. In 1992, the Ministry of Water Resources and the Viet Nam national committee for IDNDR organized an international workshop on flood mitigation, emergency preparedness and flood disaster management at Hanoi. The workshop resulted, in 1994, in the adoption of a comprehensive national strategy and action plan for mitigating water disasters in Viet Nam.

44. In another example from the region, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as early as 1991, approved the formation of an IDNDR national committee, headed by several ministers from key government sectors, in addition to the Iran Institute of Geophysics and the Red Crescent Society of Iran. It has been specifically decreed that the activities under the national committee will extend beyond the closure of the Decade at the end of 1999.

45. Information is available on progress made in disaster reduction in most other Asian countries, including such disaster-prone countries as Bangladesh, India and Nepal.

4. The Americas

46. In the Pacific rim countries of South America, El Niño-related impacts are traditionally among the most severe worldwide. The Southeastern United States, the Caribbean island States and adjacent countries in Central America are regularly frequented by forceful hurricanes originating in the Western Atlantic (hurricanes George and Mitch are recent examples). Seismic activity along most of the Pacific rim is responsible for a high earthquake risk, affecting populations concentrated in high-density urban areas and infrastructures alike.

47. Some of the major intergovernmental organizations in the hemisphere, such as PAHO, the Organization of American States (OAS) and ECLAC, as well as many bilateral agencies and NGOs, have promoted disaster management policies and practices, and have provided information and training programmes and other services for disaster reduction as part of development assistance. The shift from response and rehabilitation to prevention and preparedness has been well received, and support for the goals and objectives has been widespread in the region as a whole. Witness to this observation is the current groundswell of interest in improved early warning systems for ENSO events and the growing political support for investments towards this goal in most of the affected countries.

48. The First Hemispheric Congress on Disaster Reduction and Sustainable Development was held at Miami in 1996. The Congress built upon the plan of action adopted by the Summit of the Americas in 1994, the recommendations of the 1994 Cartagena Inter-American Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction and the 1994 IDNDR Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World. The Congress focused attention on the relationship between disaster reduction and economic development.

49. An IDNDR hemispheric meeting was held at San José from 31 May to 5 June 1999. It brought together government representatives from all the countries of the hemisphere, international agencies and NGOs. In the Declaration of San José, the Meeting noted that qualitative improvements in the region had been achieved through an increased awareness of IDNDR goals and objectives, but that a significant reduction in natural disaster impacts had not yet been achieved in the hemisphere.

50. Active IDNDR national committees or focal points have been established in Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, the British Virgin Islands, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, the Turks and Caicos Islands, the United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela.

Disaster reduction in China

The Chinese Government will continue to stick to the policy of giving priority to prevention, while combining disaster prevention with combating and relief. China will pool and rationally allocate all the resources, and properly handle the relationship among disaster reduction, population, resources and environment. We will step up the national management of natural disasters and enhance our comprehensive ability to reduce disaster. Reducing natural disaster is a long-term task facing all the countries in the world. The launching of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction has given a boost to the global disaster reduction effort. The Chinese Government has attached great importance and rendered assistance to the International Decade for National Disaster Reduction. China stands ready to intensify international exchange and cooperation in a bid to enhance its ability to manage natural disasters and make its contribution to the international disaster reduction effort.

Jiang Zemin
President of China
Beijing, 10 June 1999

C. Selected activities of United Nations agencies

51. As stated in paragraphs 1 to 5 above, in the IDNDR founding resolution, agencies within the United Nations system were urged to accord priority to IDNDR goals. The Inter-Agency Steering Committee has proven crucial in promoting collaboration and developing consensus views, initially among United Nations agencies and other participating agencies which joined the Committee at a later stage. The activities of some of the major United Nations agencies are highlighted below. Inputs from the World Bank, however, were not received in time for inclusion in the present report.

1. FAO

52. FAO has always recognized the importance of disaster reduction, and the Rome Declaration on World Food Safety specifically stated that FAO would endeavour to prevent and be prepared for disasters and other emergencies, focusing on food production requirements and rehabilitation activities. In 1994, FAO established a special programme for food security, aiming to address the need of better disaster reduction through, *inter alia*, water control and the diversification of production.

53. FAO also promotes disaster reduction in its disaster response activities. In particular, in the event of natural disasters affecting agriculture, FAO's Service for Special Relief Operations conducts assessments of relief and short-term rehabilitation requirements. FAO ensures, *inter alia*, that its relief projects incorporate elements of disaster reduction at both the community and national levels. As part of these activities, FAO provides advice and technical assistance to the countries concerned, and encourages the development of indicators of vulnerability.

54. FAO's Global Information and Early Warning Service (GIEWS) continuously monitors crops and food supply conditions worldwide, and provides warning of impending food shortages to the international community. In this connection, the Service conducts, often jointly with WFP, crop and food supply assessment missions in countries facing food emergencies caused by disasters and needing international assistance. GIEWS has extensively monitored the impact of El Niño on the crop and food supply situation in affected countries. In 1998, FAO regularly reported to the IDNDR secretariat on the impact of the El Niño and La Niña phenomena on food and the agricultural sector. FAO also participated in the international IDNDR conference on early warning for the reduction of disasters, held at Potsdam, Germany, from 7 to 11 September 1998.

2. ITU

55. Through its mandate in telecommunications, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has played a major role throughout the Decade in promoting and guiding the further growth and spread of cheap and convenient telecommunication systems worldwide. Along with the spectacular development of the World Wide Web, this has helped to make telecommunications more accessible, more versatile and more valuable for disaster reduction,

especially in communications for purposes of early warning. ITU played a major role in the adoption of the Tampere Convention in 1998, concerning the provision of telecommunication resources for disaster mitigation and relief operations. Also in 1998, the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference adopted resolution COM5/18 on the need to address the issue of how to make better use of telecommunications technology for the safety of humanitarian personnel.

3. UNESCO

56. The purposes of UNESCO in the field of natural disaster reduction are to promote a better scientific understanding of the distribution in time and space of natural hazards and their intensity, to help set up reliable observatory and early warning networks and systems, to encourage the establishment of rational land use plans, to promote the adoption of suitable building designs, to contribute to the protection of educational buildings and cultural monuments, to strengthen environmental protection for the prevention of natural disasters, to enhance preparedness and public awareness through information and education, and to conduct post-disaster investigations.

57. The Decade has had a profound impact on each area of UNESCO competence: education, natural and social sciences, culture and communication. The programmes of UNESCO and its IOC in environmental sciences and environmental education have been significantly reoriented in order to address Decade priorities and to enhance integrated approaches to solving disaster issues, in accordance with the Yokohama Plan of Action and Strategy.

58. UNESCO strongly endorses the ACC statement on the strategic importance of disaster reduction for the role of the United Nations system in the twenty-first century, and continues to view the strengthening of capacity-building for vulnerability reduction and disaster prevention as fundamental to the principles of sustainable development. UNESCO believes, therefore, that the success of the follow-up to the Decade will depend on an identifiable and stable secretariat, capable of continuing the synergies, coordination and concentration among all IDNDR stakeholders, including those in the United Nations system.

4. UNIDO

59. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) contributes to the goals of IDNDR through the technical assistance it provides to the construction sector. This assistance relates to improved structural design, promotion of disaster-resistant building shapes and the use of improved materials and fixing methods. It also includes efforts to change attitudes to disaster reduction and raise awareness of the importance of regular inspections of building designs and on-site practices.

60. UNIDO also contributes to disaster reduction in coastal areas through the promotion of risk assessment methods in its coastal zone management and tools for environmental risk assessment programme. The methods of estimating risks associated with future events in coastal zones cover both the prediction of environmental impacts and the calculation of the risks of damages involved. This UNIDO programme is focused on coastlines, estuaries and deltas, which are typically vulnerable to impacts from El Niño.

5. WHO

61. WHO has collaborated in IDNDR initiatives from the inception of the Decade. According to WHO, disaster prevention in public health calls for the handling of prevention, preparedness, response and rehabilitation in an integrated manner. WHO approaches to disaster reduction concentrate on the reduction of disaster vulnerabilities of populations and public health systems and infrastructures. In order to preserve the gains made in the past 10 years, WHO supports the view expressed by ACC that a United Nations system-wide focus must be maintained beyond the conclusion of the Decade.

6. WMO

62. WMO figures as the technical agency par excellence in the support of disaster reduction activities undertaken by the United Nations system. In cooperation with UNESCO and its IOC, and the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU), WMO has been the scientific and technical driving force for IDNDR activities on climate-related disasters. The Decade coincided with an increased interest in global climate modelling, forecasting and monitoring and the early stages of development of the WMO/UNEP-administered Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. WMO has been the driving force behind the creation of the inter-agency "climate agenda" (adopted in 1996) and the establishment of the Inter-Agency Committee on the Climate Agenda. With deep-rooted traditions in the Tropical Ocean and Global Atmosphere Study and the Climate Vulnerability and Predictability Research programmes, WMO's world climate programme has been a steady partner of IDNDR in the execution of technical tasks, especially of the Inter-Agency Task Force on El Niño.

D. IDNDR concluding event

63. The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction comes to its conclusion in 1999. Based on the model of the Decade's mid-term review, as described in section II above, the international community will undertake a final evaluation of how the concept of disaster reduction has evolved over time, and more importantly whether the concept has been successfully implemented with concrete results. The General Assembly has decided on a two-tier closing event, consisting of a legislative platform provided by the substantive session of 1999 of the Council and a complementary substantive platform, the IDNDR programme forum, which was organized at Geneva from 5 to 9 July 1999. Within the forum, all partners of the IDNDR Framework have exchanged information on 10 years of achievements, as well as emerging trends and challenges for the future, and have exchanged views on how best to tackle these challenges through a concerted programme of action towards a safer world in the twenty-first century. The complementarity, at Geneva, between Council discussions and the IDNDR programme forum will enable dialogue and interaction between Governments, the United Nations system and those manifold organizations and individuals worldwide that have made disaster reduction, as embodied in IDNDR, into a working reality. The outcome of the Council deliberations will enable the Member States community to make a sound judgement on what the Decade has generated, what remains to be done, and how this would best be achieved in the future.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Summary overview on the outcome of the IDNDR programme forum

64. The conclusions emanating from the implementation of IDNDR's 10-year programme of disaster reduction are best reflected by the summary presentation of key results of the variety of thematic sessions organized within the IDNDR programme forum. They were presented by the Rapporteur General of the forum at the event's concluding session, and are set out below.

65. **Poverty.** The people that are most vulnerable to natural disasters are the poor, who have very limited resources for avoiding losses. Environmental degradation resulting from poverty exacerbates disaster impacts. Without greater attention from policy makers and more support from donor agencies for disaster prevention action, many developing countries, particularly in Africa, will not be able to escape from this situation. Innovative approaches are needed; emphasis should be given to programmes to promote community-based approaches.

66. **Megacities and urban areas.** Concentrations of population in major urban centres (megacities), many of which are located in hazard-prone areas in developing countries, are highly vulnerable to natural and technological hazards due to dependence on complex infrastructures and the occupation of marginal land. Greater attention should be given to developing resilient and redundant infrastructures and to overall vulnerability reduction through regional and land-use planning.

67. **Communities.** Most disaster prevention and mitigation action requires community acceptance and initiative, which must be based on a credible assessment of risks and realistic estimates of costs and benefits. Communities are often generally knowledgeable about their own environments and coping mechanisms, and of ways to reduce vulnerabilities. Community leadership also enhances independence and self-reliance. National, regional and international efforts towards disaster prevention and mitigation are essential, but should be seen as supportive of community-based actions.

68. **Awareness.** Public awareness of natural hazards and risks, the driving force for prevention action, should be solidly grounded in the best scientific and technological information and methodology. IDNDR has promoted this goal and is seen as a key factor in increasing political sensitivities towards the need for disaster reduction measures and policies.

69. **Warnings.** Warnings for some types of hazards have saved many lives and are steadily improving, which is a major achievement during recent years. This has been made possible by improvements in monitoring, analytical, and communications systems. Nevertheless, further advances are possible and should be pursued. Warnings can be used to avoid disasters rather than just respond to them. Special attention should be given to delivering the right message to the right people at the right time.

70. **Information.** Advances in information technology in recent years now provide enormous resources for decision makers. However, efforts are needed to distill this information into products that are tailored for the specific needs and delivered in a timely manner. Advances in communications technology make possible integration of real-time and archival data for emergency situations.

71. **Education and training.** Education and training for disaster reduction is a key, cross-cutting issue that must be

an integral part of all programmes. Creative use of films and videos, as well as of modern dissemination means, can be especially effective. Information must be seen as authoritative and credible, which can be achieved by linking experts with community leaders. Education resources provided by regional and international organizations, including NGOs, can be particularly helpful.

72. **Partnerships.** Partnerships involving public and private organizations can be particularly effective in linking stakeholders and implementing plans. The private sector may be able to promote mitigation by providing incentives, for example by ensuring compliance to building codes that would reduce insurance premiums as a condition for coverage.

73. **Risk management.** Risk management should be better integrated into overall developmental and environmental planning. Cost-effectiveness of proposed action is an essential consideration. Post-disaster recovery and reconstruction provide an opportunity and resources to implement prevention and mitigation as an essential element of sustainable development. Improvements have been made in recent years in risk assessment and loss estimation methodology.

74. **Health.** Natural disasters require close collaboration between scientists and decision makers to assure that authoritative information on potential or actual health problems is communicated and is incorporated into preventive and preparedness policies and strategies for minimizing the health consequences of natural disasters. It is often difficult to achieve this goal in the face of uncertain and/or sustained situations. The effects of climate variability on health are of growing interest.

75. **Climate variability.** The successful prediction of the El Niño phenomena during 1997/98 signalled an improving capability for forecasting climate variability. As climate variation affects the occurrence of natural hazards, such as drought, heavy rainfall with floods and landslides, and tropical cyclones, this development carries great implications for natural disaster reduction. In advance of El Niño, some communities took preventive action that significantly reduced potential impacts.

76. **Environment and ecosystems.** Natural hazards impact the environment and environmental degradation can exacerbate disasters. Small island States and mountain communities can be especially vulnerable. Hazard and risk assessments should be improved to guide prevention and mitigation measures for protecting the environment.

77. **Research.** Substantial progress has been achieved in understanding the cause and effects of natural hazards. Nevertheless, further efforts are needed, especially with respect to risk assessment and warnings. Multidisciplinary efforts are needed for many problems, especially to better integrate physical and social sciences.

78. **Land-use planning.** Hazard assessments, including the likelihood and potential severity of an event, provide the basis for avoiding hazards by siting structures out of harm's way. This information should be incorporated in land-use plans to avoid development in vulnerable flood plains, coastal and fault zones, and other hazardous areas.

79. **Building codes and practices.** In many cases, rather simple modifications to current building practices could greatly improve performance under hazard-induced stress. Retrofitting existing structures, however, poses a challenge due to cost. Emphasis is now being given to overall building performance, moving beyond the previous focus on life safety. Methods have been advanced for better housing construction using local materials, which should be more broadly communicated.

80. **Loss data.** Reliable data on natural disaster losses, other than human casualties, are very limited. Standard methods should be employed for collecting such data. National statistics on losses could be used to measure progress on disaster reduction.

81. **Framework.** The international and regional framework provided by IDNDR has been of great assistance to many nations in focusing attention on the threat posed by natural hazards and the means for mitigating their impacts, and through IDNDR many high-level decision makers have become aware of the vulnerabilities and the opportunities to reduce them. It is of the utmost importance that such a framework continue to be provided in the future beyond the Decade.

B. Final declaration adopted by the IDNDR programme forum

82. The substantive recommendations of the International Framework of Action for IDNDR, as assembled at the IDNDR programme forum, are contained in the event's final declaration, as follows:

> We, participants in the IDNDR International Programme Forum: Towards Partnerships for Disaster Reduction in the Twenty-first Century, recognize that the world is increasingly being threatened by large-scale disasters triggered by hazards, which will have

long-term negative social, economic, and environmental consequences on our societies and hamper our capacity to ensure sustainable development and investment, particularly in developing countries.

We have to act decisively now to guarantee a safer world for future generations. We must build on progress achieved during IDNDR so that risk management and disaster reduction become essential elements of government policies. The Yokohama Strategy (1994) and the strategy "A safer world in the twenty-first century: risk and disaster reduction" (1999) chart the course. Political will is essential to ensure that appropriate policies and institutional arrangements foster a culture of prevention at all levels of our societies.

We shall adopt and implement policy measures at the international, regional, subregional, national and local levels aimed at reducing the vulnerability of our societies to both natural and technological hazards through proactive rather than reactive approaches. These measures shall have as main objectives the establishment of hazard-resilient communities and the protection of people from the threat of disasters. They shall also contribute to safeguarding our natural and economic resources, and our social well-being and livelihoods.

Furthermore, scientific, social and economic research, and technological and planning applications will be required at all levels and from a wide range of disciplines in order to support risk management and effective reduction of our vulnerabilities. In this connection, there is a need for increased information exchange, improved early warning capacities, technology transfer and technical cooperation among all countries, paying particular attention to the most vulnerable and affected.

These last 10 years have shown the multisectoral, interdisciplinary and cross-cutting nature of broad risk management and its contribution to disaster reduction. Continued interaction and cooperation on the above basis, among all disciplines and institutions concerned, are considered essential to accomplish commonly agreed objectives and priorities. This interaction should be based on the strengthening of cooperation and partnerships engendered by the IDNDR programme.

We stress the importance of developing and strengthening regional approaches dedicated to disaster reduction in order to take account of local specificity and needs. We emphasize, in this respect, the need to support institutional initiatives and mechanisms for strengthening regional, subregional, national and local capabilities, coordination and applied research. We recognize the particular need for establishing an institutional arrangement to coordinate disaster reduction in Africa, and in this regard invite existing and evolving mechanisms for interregional cooperation to accord priority to these concerns.

Appropriate financial resources will be needed to ensure the development and implementation of prevention and mitigation policies and programmes in all countries, particularly developing countries. Innovative approaches should be explored, including the funding of international initiatives. However, full use should be made of existing regional and national financial mechanisms involving those communities most directly exposed to risks. All bilateral and multilateral development assistance should include disaster reduction components.

We recommend to the international community and the United Nations that based on the proven success of the functional responsibilities and organizational arrangements during IDNDR, the international cooperative framework for disaster reduction be maintained and strengthened. This framework should ensure partnership and synergy among all elements of risk management and disaster reduction, and should promote a shift from a mentality of reaction to a culture of prevention. The growing threat of political, social and economic disruption caused by natural and technological disasters calls for bold action from Member States of the United Nations in this regard.

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International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

Final report of the Scientific and Technical Committee of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction

Summary

The present report conveys the views of the Scientific and Technical Committee of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Committee assesses progress during the Decade, and provides concluding observations about future needs as well as recommendations for arrangements to ensure continued international commitment for disaster prevention into the twenty-first century. The report first provides a summary review of salient developments in primary areas of disaster reduction. It highlights how scientific knowledge and technical experience can best be utilized in conjunction with public policies to minimize social disruption and economic loss from natural and similar disasters which have an adverse effect on the environment. However, the pace of implementation must be enhanced, as the subject becomes embedded in more professional disciplines and intersectoral forms of endeavour. The need is urgent as the costs of disaster consequences to societies around the world

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continue to rise, and as conditions of natural hazards are likely to produce more frequent and severe risks for the future. The need for sustained commitment to disaster prevention is universal and of importance to all societies, but the greatest impacts of natural hazards continue to fall on developing countries, countries in transition and the poor, wherever they may live. The report concludes that remarkable progress has been made in the acceptance of the desirability and feasibility of prevention policies, and numerous activities promote multidisciplinary commitments to effective disaster reduction.

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I. Introduction

1. The Member States of the United Nations proclaimed the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) in General Assembly resolution 44/236 of 22 December 1989, on the basis of the report of the International Ad Hoc Group of Experts on IDNDR (A/44/322–E/1989/114/Add.1, annex). It has had the objective of reducing through concerted international action, especially in developing countries, loss of life, property damage and social and economic disruption caused by natural hazards, including earthquakes, tropical cyclones and other storms, tsunamis, floods, landslides, volcanic activity, wildfires, locust and similar infestations, drought and desertification, and other calamities of natural origin.

2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly established the International Framework of Action for IDNDR (General Assembly resolution 44/236, annex) which called upon all Governments to assume the primary responsibility to formulate national disaster mitigation programmes and other policies which would reduce the consequences of natural disasters. In addition, scientific and technological institutions, financial bodies, insurance enterprises, non-governmental and other appropriate organizations, as well as all organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, were urged to accord priority to natural disaster preparedness, prevention, relief and short-term recovery throughout their operational activities.

3. The Framework stated several explicit goals that this broad range of collaborators should strive to accomplish during the Decade: build national capabilities to mitigate the effects of natural disasters; develop guidelines and strategies for applying existing knowledge; foster research to close gaps in knowledge; disseminate information; and develop measures to apply technical assistance and technology transfer, demonstration projects, and education and training. Later, programme targets were declared by the IDNDR Scientific and Technical Committee to encourage all countries to conduct a national hazard risk assessment; incorporate a sustained disaster mitigation strategy into the national economic development plan; and ensure improved access to effective early warning practices at all levels of responsibility.

4. In the broad context of international development issues, Agenda 21[1] emphasized that sustainable economic growth and development cannot be achieved without taking measures to reduce losses from natural disasters, further considering the close linkages between disaster losses and environmental degradation. In a similar context, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development,[2] in particular principle 18, stressed the need for the international community to assist States afflicted by natural disasters and other emergencies that are likely to produce sudden harmful effects in the environment of those States. The outcome of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States[3] and the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s (A/CONF.147/MISC.9) called for priority attention to be given by activities of the Decade to small island developing States and least developed countries. The IDNDR secretariat was designated by the General Assembly in its resolution 51/185 to serve as the task manager to small island developing States related to disaster prevention in reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development.

5. The mid-term evaluation of the Decade conducted at the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction (Yokohama, 23–27 May 1994) noted that although not a part of the mandate of the Decade, the concept of disaster reduction should be enlarged to cover natural and other disaster situations, including environmental and technological disasters, and their relationship, which can have a significant impact on social, economic, cultural and environmental systems, in particular in developing countries (see A/CONF.172/9, chap. I, resolution 1, annex I, sect.I.B).

6. In recognition of the intersectoral and cross-cutting nature of disaster prevention relating to matters of national planning and development, the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World: Guidelines for Natural Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Mitigation, containing the Principles, the Strategy and the Plan of Action (A/CONF.179/2, chap. I, resolution 1, annex I), outlined principles and specific recommendations for action at the community and national levels, at the regional and subregional levels, and at the international and bilateral levels of involvement. The same objectives and primary areas of interest promoted by the Yokohama Strategy are emphasized in the IDNDR action plan for 1998/99 to develop greater opportunities for multidisciplinary involvement through inter-agency and organizational partnerships.

7. By drawing on these previous observations and the lessons derived from major disaster occurrences in the later years of the Decade, the Scientific and Technical Committee assesses progress during the Decade in the present report and looks to the future. The report does not provide a comprehensive inventory of IDNDR activities but rather comments on and evaluates the more salient developments during the Decade. These views intend to convey a sense of how best to proceed by incorporating current scientific and technical knowledge into the public policy decision-making

process for the benefit of reducing disaster risks, ultimately at the local community levels. Conditions of increasing social and economic vulnerability will almost certainly lead to unprecedented natural and related hazards in the future, so specific recommendations are made to ensure continued advocacy, the development of policies and the coordination of institutionalized abilities into the twenty-first century. Through continued public awareness and practical application of disaster mitigation techniques, disaster reduction must be understood and realized as a public value.

II. Nature of the threat: natural hazards and contemporary society

8. In almost every country of the world, the consequences of natural hazards seriously affect the quality of life, often potentially thwarting efforts by people to better their lives. In some countries, annual losses associated with natural disasters approach five per cent of gross domestic product in a year, thereby wiping out or substantially reducing the gains sought by investments for economic growth and development. The most disastrous events have killed hundreds of thousands of people and caused over 100 billion dollars in property damage. Throughout the 1990s, the economic losses attributed to great natural catastrophes have averaged more than $40 billion a year. In 1998 alone, natural disasters claimed the lives of more than 50,000 people and caused economic losses exceeding $90 billion. Even more striking, there has been a significant rising trend in these losses during the 1990s, which are almost three times greater than those recorded in the 1980s.[4] Losses of this scale can create economic turmoil and lead to social and possible political instability. As resources become even more tightly managed, all efforts must be employed to reduce the wastage of resources and to protect existing assets and previous investments. Moreover, in part because of short-sighted international trade practices and financial practices and uncontrolled growth, especially in urban areas, a concern has become evident of growing inequities in vulnerability among countries. As a result, the impacts of natural disasters and greater losses often fall most heavily on countries with fragile or transitional economies and people who otherwise lack the resources or technical capabilities to mitigate the risk of natural disasters. This need not remain the case.

9. It has now become evident that the worst effects of natural disasters are frequently linked to human behaviour and settlement patterns, with the result that natural hazards can sometimes trigger subsequent technological disasters. Deforestation easily contributes to increased frequency and severity of floods and landslides. Earthquakes can cause chemical spills and fires, as floods can easily cause contamination by hazardous materials. Recent disasters, such as those related to the El Niño climatic variation in 1997/98, wildfire and associated atmospheric hazards on three continents, and the severe devastation of Hurricane Mitch experienced throughout Central America all further demonstrate the transboundary effects and larger regional consequences associated with natural hazards.

10. Such far-reaching consequences emphasize that natural hazards can no longer be considered as individual, isolated emergency events, to be addressed only in terms of immediate emergency response. Rather, a multidisciplinary and intersectoral approach is essential to anticipate natural, environmental, and technological hazards. It is essential that means to prevent natural disasters draw on scientific and technical knowledge in formulating public policy and decision-making processes. While natural hazards will continue to pose periodic and sometimes recurrent threats to most societies, in many countries a recognition has developed during the course of IDNDR that they need not necessarily become social and economic disasters.

11. Increasingly, many disaster mitigation actions will require difficult choices about the allocation of resources, use of land-use policies, enforcing building practices, and giving priority protection to different types of infrastructure. These decisions, therefore, need to be informed by scientific knowledge and technical experience and included as components of an overall sustainable development decision-making process. Judgements should address equally the environmental considerations involved, as well as sustained programmes of public information and education, including efforts to train and involve future generations.

III. Collaborative endeavour: an emergent community of interests

A. Representative elements of the International Framework

12. A major success of the Decade has been a widespread acceptance of the fact that the growing risk of disasters associated with natural hazards, frequently compounded by uncontrolled or adverse human practices, must be mitigated. The financial costs involved in not doing so simply cannot continue to be absorbed by any society. The feasibility of preventing disasters has become more widely understood and accepted. A recognition has emerged that rather than being

a specialist activity realized only at the time of an immediate threat or a singular event, hazard awareness and risk management responsibilities must be incorporated within ongoing professional activities and local community endeavours evident in all societies.

13. This, however, necessitates including a much wider range of participants than has traditionally been involved in disaster management responsibilities. Abilities essential to the reduction of natural and similar disasters are increasingly being drawn from the public sector, professional and institutional organizations, commercial interests and local forms of community leadership. This growing body of interests is characteristic of extended and distributed networks essential to the work, organizational relationships and forms of communication within modern societies. In physical terms, hazards do not respect political borders, nor in a global economic environment do they remain strictly national affairs. Disaster prevention is inherently multidisciplinary and intersectoral; to become sustainable it must also be transferred to succeeding generations.

14. These necessities for dealing with risk require additional operational partnerships and innovative forms of organizational relationships for the future. They are already becoming embodied in both public and private forms of collaboration, which jointly work through partnership to increase public knowledge and community involvement in disaster reduction activities.

15. In practical terms, reducing the impact of natural hazards depends on several crucial functions, each of which is dependent upon the collaboration of a rapidly expanding range of professional disciplines. Risk assessment is fundamental to a viable programme of disaster reduction, and comprises both the anticipation of likely hazards and an estimation of their potential effects in terms of prevailing vulnerability. The collection and analysis of required information involves many technical experts, but it also depends on other professional skills so that it may be disseminated rapidly and in a manner that is readily understood. Only then can it be utilized effectively by the public and decision makers to inform well considered policies, or to determine the most beneficial interventions.

16. Banking and financial institutions, international technical assistance organizations and the specialized abilities of various United Nations agencies all have a role to play in ensuring that human, technical and material resources are wisely directed to sustained programmes of applied disaster mitigation practices. Established and locally relevant early warning systems are a basic component of any viable disaster reduction strategy, which equally needs to be linked to an operational contingent capability for possible emergency events. Carrying out all of these activities requires cooperation from an expanding range of organizational sectors, currently designated as the IDNDR International Framework. During the Decade, this has included government authorities, technical agencies, many academic disciplines, commercial interests and non-governmental or local community organizations.

B. IDNDR organizational structures

17. In its resolution 44/236, in which it founded IDNDR, the General Assembly established organizational structures to implement the objectives of the Decade. To focus public attention on the issues, the second Wednesday of October was declared to be observed annually by the international community as International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction. Since 1995, this designation has provided the impetus to develop specific themes for international events to advance the objective and goals of the Decade.

18. The IDNDR Scientific and Technical Committee is comprised of 49 international experts (see annex I below) as an advisory body to develop and to make recommendations to the Secretary-General on overall programmes. It has functioned continuously since its formation in 1990 (see annex II below), becoming more diversified in its composition and focused in its deliberations as the Decade has progressed. Since 1997, it has issued declarations following each of its meetings to call international attention to the importance of sustained international and institutional support for disaster reduction, both within and beyond the United Nations.

19. While a Special High-Level Council was also initially constituted in 1991, it was not sustained. Similarly, the original intention outlined for the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat to have a featured role in raising awareness of disaster prevention among the general public was not significantly realized throughout the Decade.

20. The IDNDR secretariat was established in 1990 to provide support to these organizational bodies, and to undertake the day-to-day coordination of Decade activities. It developed from a basic staffing complement that supported the original Ad Hoc Group of Experts, and it has functioned as effectively as funds permitted during the entire Decade. However, during its earlier years its effectiveness was sometimes constrained by uncertain staffing considerations, as well as by later shifts in emphasis within the international development community that tended to

focus predominantly on matters of emergency relief assistance and related operational aspects of complex disasters, often at the expense of longer-term prevention strategies. Overall, however, the secretariat performed very well over the course of the Decade, probably serving as the single most important factor in sustaining the Decade despite the limited resources available.

21. As an official United Nations conference, the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction (Yokohama, Japan, 23–27 May 1994) became a watershed event of the Decade. In addition to serving as the occasion of the favourable mid-term review of the Decade, the primary outcome of the meeting was the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action. This operational blueprint continues to provide guidance to all members of the International Framework, as it calls upon nations, working individually and together, to implement policies and principles for disaster reduction that were reaffirmed by the 155 national delegations present.

IV. Accomplishments and overall evaluation of the Decade

A. Policy commitment

22. Unless the most senior government officials recognize and endorse the need for a commitment to mitigation practices, as an investment in protecting assets and conserving resources, disaster reduction will be assigned a low priority. History shows that without forethought, short-term crises of the day can easily overshadow the longer-term considerations and absorb resources needed to implement effective loss reduction measures. Organizations and government authorities alike must make a clear assignment of responsibilities, with the dedication of necessary resources, to implement mitigation.

23. Governments cannot sustain mitigation measures without broad public support. Many measures appear expensive, at least in the short term, or add costs to construction projects. In other cases, land owners will not readily accept a decision to develop land in a manner that yields less than the maximum short-term profit. In the face of these pressures, public understanding of hazards and an awareness of relative risks are essential to choosing government officials who will implement sound policies which can protect community assets and resources.

B. Hazard assessment

24. The causes of natural hazards are sufficiently well understood to provide a basis for undertaking actions to mitigate their effects. Nevertheless, research should continue to advance the understanding of natural hazards, including a measure of their effects on society, in order to improve estimates of threats and provide a sound basis for utilizing limited resources for mitigation and preparedness actions. The regions of the world that are prone to natural hazards are generally well delineated, and this knowledge provides the foundation for identifying the most threatened areas within countries. In some countries, the threat can be characterized with sufficient detail to enable the policy understanding and the mitigation of these hazards into land-use plans.

25. National and local public authorities, however, need to integrate hazard and vulnerability assessments more fully into their overall planning efforts. This requires that the risks associated with natural hazards be evaluated systematically and in concert with other factors influencing development decisions. Progress has been noted in this respect, as indicated by significant efforts in some countries and the increasing attention being given in international developmental discussions, such as those associated with El Niño or disaster rehabilitation efforts in Central America. Much greater attention to this fundamental basis for disaster prevention is required for the future, particularly within the context of countries' own planning initiatives.

C. Vulnerability and risk assessment

26. Natural hazards become disasters when they affect people and their socio-economic infrastructure to such an extent that the community or country cannot cope with the overall impact. The ability to deal with disasters varies considerably among different populations, with the poor having the fewest options and limited resources to cope or recover. They often occupy marginal or unstable lands or inhabit substandard structures. Despite their fundamental importance to the well-being of a society, hospitals and schools often suffer disproportionate damage from natural disasters.

27. The increasing concentration of population in large cities poses a degree of vulnerability that can threaten the economic viability of a country or region. These megacities serve as hubs and centres for transportation, communications, financial and commercial activity, as well as government. The severe impairment of their functions or

a disruption of increasingly complex but vital public utilities and physical infrastructure can bring a country to its knees. Small island developing States are threatened to a similar degree, but due to their physical isolation and limited economic base are often dependent on a single industry, such as tourism. Natural hazards can also threaten the cultural heritage of countries, and have destroyed irreplaceable works of art, historical locations and architecture.

28. Technical and procedural methods for estimating risk have improved substantially in recent years, and are becoming widely employed in the insurance and financial sectors for loss estimation. Advances should be pursued in this methodology, and the inventories of vulnerable structures and their exposure to various risks should be further developed. To address such a need, both technical experts and public policy authorities are working together to assess seismic risks and determine suitable mitigation strategies under the IDNDR secretariat-managed project on risk assessment tools for the diagnosis of urban areas against seismic disasters. There have also been a number of recently developed opportunities for advanced El Niño and regional climatic forecasts that can stimulate medium-termed vulnerability assessments. These are increasingly being accomplished and shared by multiple collaborating professional interests, especially in Eastern and Southern Africa and the Americas. As these examples demonstrate, risk assessments can be more widely utilized in regional and national development planning, drawing upon an increasingly wide range of professional abilities committed to shared policy objectives.

D. Risk reduction

29. Since substantial resources in most countries are linked to economic development, it is important that natural disaster mitigation become an integral part of the development process. Failure to adopt such a basic strategy as a foundation for disaster reduction can easily jeopardize economic development itself. The highest priority should be accorded to making this link, and many of the most productive measures that can be employed involve land-use planning, investment incentives and construction practices.

30. Economic development usually focuses on large projects or national financial policies involving substantial resources. Macroeconomic analyses can easily obscure the fact that many of the most vulnerable people have virtually no resources and exist outside the realm of developmental interests. Such people need low-cost methods to improve their housing, using materials or skills that are close at hand. Some IDNDR demonstration projects and other activities have proven methods using adobe or timber construction. Information needs to be distributed and training provided for people to benefit from these methods.

31. Hazard insurance provides a means for spreading risks, thereby facilitating investments in hazardous regions. Incentives can also be provided by insurance policies to reduce risks through applied mitigation practices, even as insurance payments following a disaster can stimulate recovery. In any of these cases, insurance premiums should be based on a realistic assessment of the risks, which must depend on hazard assessments. If premiums are set lower than is appropriate for a given risk, investment in effect becomes subsidized and a further liability is encouraged.

32. The direct cost of a natural disaster, measured only by damage to structures and injuries to people, is often dwarfed by the indirect and secondary costs. A large part of indirect costs is associated with the interruption or loss of business. In any natural disaster, many commercial establishments are forced to close and many never reopen, with attendant loss of employment. Spurred on by increasing competition and the demands of a global economy, businesses are now investing in preventive strategies to ensure their business continuity. In economic terms, the recognition of the value that "Prevention pays" has motivated businesses to pursue disaster reduction strategies as integral parts of their core business, and has led to some international cooperation and sharing of ideas in this important field. This is an initiative that should be encouraged, and through increased examples of public-private partnerships the benefits of the experience may become more widespread within the management and provision of more government and public services.

E. Communications and information

33. In order for any efforts at risk reduction to be successful, possible threats must be communicated through a chain of public authorities, as well as with the full comprehension of the public. The information provided can take a variety of forms, depending on the nature of the hazard and the time-frame involved. These various situations, ranging from an advanced hazard assessment of potential risk through an immediate alert of a clearly impending event each present different information and communication requirements.

34. Over the last decade, the availability of information about natural hazards and disasters has increased enormously. This has occurred through new studies of these phenomena, an explosive expansion of global channels of

communication, and perhaps most significantly through the widespread use of the Internet in most parts of the world. The use of global information systems has revolutionized opportunities for hazard mapping and risk assessment, even at quite localized levels. There have also been significant improvements in disseminating real or nearly real-time hazard information and warnings. More databases that contribute to the exchange and application of mitigation practices have become widely available and are globally accessible. New graphic information products and the availability of electronic information in more languages have also increased the possibilities for wider dissemination of hazard information. Efforts are needed to increase general and ready access to all of these modern channels of communication, especially the Internet. Challenges remain to improve the quality of the data, and to develop tools and operational standards for facilitating the compilation, synthesis and analysis of data.

35. The ability for individuals and computer systems to communicate has also been transformed in recent years, and even greater opportunities appear in the near future. The improvements in telephone, Internet, data systems and networks, their increasing availability, carrying capacity and speed of transmission, coupled with satellite-based transmission systems, are systematically changing and enhancing the way information is exchanged and shared. In addition, it is already possible to communicate between notebook-sized satellite telephones or computers anywhere. New orbiting satellite systems will shortly make it feasible to send and receive voice, data or Internet information with hand-held instruments. Today, and even more in the future, Governments and all organizations have a remarkable opportunity to enhance their communications capabilities, including those impervious to natural hazards.

36. The print and electronic media wield substantial power, and can greatly facilitate the understanding of hazards and the communication of disaster-related information to the public. Successful and even expanded use of the media for disaster reduction must, however, overcome several problems. Many providers of information about hazards and disaster conditions are technical experts, whereas many of the people involved in communicating the information are not. The comprehension of many people for whom information is intended frequently is determined by still other contexts or more localized perceptions. Additional issues concern how to present the message in an appealing and understandable manner. Presentation of information through the media deserves special attention by all organizations concerned with natural disasters, focused especially on the perceived suitability to address the needs of the intended users.

F. Early warning

37. As was emphasized at the IDNDR international conference on early warning systems (Potsdam, Germany, September 1998), effective early warning is a process that must bring together scientific analysis and technical forecasting of a hazard, together with the political decision-making process and the availability of local community capabilities to heed the warning. The declaration of the Potsdam early warning conference provides a summary of critical functional responsibilities, and it also serves as a call to action for all parties concerned to carry improved early warning practices into the twenty-first century.

38. The dissemination of information about early warning among service agencies or to the public must be given careful thought in each case. Such actions must be based upon well conceived and often technical systems for observation and analysis. Different forms of dissemination become necessary, involving different actors and various forms of communication that may be drawn from commercial interests, public media and governmental authorities. Most importantly, any warning must include a clear and informed statement of instruction or guidance sufficient to lead to effective action to avoid or minimize the consequences of the hazard. Governments themselves need to assess the adequacy of each of these stages of the warning process, and should give a high priority to establishing comprehensive, reliable and credible warning systems. These coordinated activities are crucial to reducing losses so that early warning becomes an essential element of any comprehensive disaster prevention strategy.

G. Education and training

39. During the Decade, significant progress has taken place with respect to education and training applicable to natural disaster reduction. This is reflected by a diversity of initiatives, ranging from practical community-based training to postgraduate education. In the course of IDNDR, there has been a significant increase in the community risk reduction and hazard awareness programmes for such threats as cyclones, hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes and wildfires. The diversity and imagination reflected in such local training initiatives provides evidence of the enormous creativity

within local authorities, national civil protection and disaster management agencies, as well as that located in youth groups, radio and television networks, NGOs and community-based organizations. It is also reflected increasingly by the development of locally or regionally created training and educational materials and learning packages, which are frequently more directly relevant to regionally specific risk profiles.

40. Similarly, there has been an upsurge in educational activities focused on natural risk and disaster reduction. From primary and secondary education through institutions of higher learning, more attention is being devoted to information about natural hazards and associated risks, as well as incorporating prevention and preparedness measures into existing educational programmes. Within primary schools, IDNDR's annual Natural Disaster Reduction Day has served as an important vehicle for making links between more conventional subject matter and disaster-specific themes. Topics like "Cities at risk" and "Water — too much — too little" have been well received in primary school curricula. Accompanying IDNDR information kits have been popular, enabling teachers to incorporate key disaster reduction concepts into classes and lesson plans.

H. Effectiveness of national committees

41. In General Assembly resolution 44/236, in which IDNDR was founded, Member States were asked to formulate national disaster mitigation programmes; establish national committees or focal points; mobilize support; increase public awareness; pay due attention to health care and related forms of essential social and economic infrastructure; and improve availability of emergency supplies. The formation of multisectoral national committees or focal points for disaster reduction were considered to be the best means for realizing these goals at the local level. In response to this recommendation, about 130 countries responded by identifying such an entity.

42. The effectiveness of national committees or focal points have varied from being highly effective to being parochial or inactive. Some have become a significant force for concentrating and mobilizing policy interests and professional applications in carefully conceived programmes in some countries. In others, more narrowly focused organizations have not adequately involved the wide range of participation that would have been preferred. The extent to which national committees or focal points concentrated on largely domestic aspects of disaster reduction, at the expense of broader regional or international interaction, also varied considerably. Where there were more limited accomplishments, they frequently resulted from the ways in which committees were first composed. Limitations included a failure to address sufficiently the breadth of interests of all potential stakeholders, not providing adequate resources or authority, or not being fully attentive to the original intentions of the Decade. In some few cases, the requirements of disaster prevention became too easily dominated by more traditional and limited concepts of emergency response, or they were cast in functional terms of planning for emergency disaster assistance frequently associated with established civil defence measures.

43. By contrast, there were noteworthy examples in which a contingent of highly motivated individuals drawn from a variety of professions dedicated much of their professional time and abilities to promoting a coherent programme of disaster mitigation, regardless of whether there was an officially constituted national committee or not. The success of this work often stemmed from a professional relationship or dedicated research interests, rather than from explicit institutionalized support. An important accomplishment of the Decade has been the opportunity it has provided for greater recognition of these singular initiatives. It has also aided institutions in appreciating that issues which contribute to disaster reduction often relate to their core interests.

I. Initiatives of city officials and at other local levels

44. Local authorities and municipalities have shown an increasing willingness to become involved with the Decade. This is a result of the recognition of disaster reduction as a central aspect to many local-level policies, including social vulnerability, urban risk management, land use planning, and in general the assessment of local community exposure to the consequences of severe natural phenomena. Furthermore, local officials are those most immediately involved with hazards, and have a direct responsibility in managing the risk of both natural and technological disasters. It should be noted that besides the involvement of local authorities through their international institutions and associations, a wide range of initiatives has been taken by municipalities and provinces in their own capacity, both in response to IDNDR awareness-raising campaigns and as the result of an increased understanding of the importance of disaster reduction in urban areas.

V. Major challenges for the twenty-first century

45. The extent of vulnerability within a society will determine its exposure to the impact of a hazard, and therefore the scale or magnitude of a potential disaster. Households and communities in developing countries are particularly vulnerable to natural hazards because of many interrelated factors, including large populations living in high-risk areas, frequently in conditions of poverty; livelihood insecurity; and environmental degradation. In many developing countries, infrastructure and crucial lifeline systems are particularly exposed to the effects of natural hazards. In industrialized countries too, with an increasing interdependency between information, complex technological facilities, human systems and hazards, there is now the potential for catastrophic failures on a global basis, as the example of the year 2000 computer problem has demonstrated. Equally, the relationship between human behaviour and biomedical risks has also become more evident, exacerbated by the ease of rapid international transmission of public health and environmental health hazards, including food contamination, as seen for instance in the dramatic spread of human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) throughout the world. Emphasis needs to be given by Governments, international development organizations, commercial interests and other sources of financial investment to ensure that all crucial systems which underpin modern societies are regularly assessed and remain disaster-resistant.

46. Overall vulnerability to disasters will certainly intensify unless there are significant improvements in access to essential social services and economic security, and unless sustained efforts are made to protect the crucial social and economic systems on which all societies depend. The reduction of vulnerability is an inherent part of sustainable development that must take account of the role of scientific and technical knowledge, ensure significant levels of popular participation and promote a full acceptance of careful environmental management.

47. Hence, the underlying challenge for the future is that the composite subjects of disaster prevention must become accepted as a public value and be explicitly embodied in official public policy responsibilities. Therefore, the major challenges for the twenty-first century described below can only be met fully with the exercise of authority and the distinct allocation of resources becoming accepted as integral elements of comprehensive national economic and development planning processes.

A. Integrated risk management and vulnerability reduction

48. Communities and development organizations can reduce potential natural disaster losses through a continuous programme of applied mitigation measures that are integrated into a comprehensive disaster prevention programme. Land-use planning and building standards are two of the major strategies for reducing vulnerability. Preparedness plans and warning systems are also essential elements. Mitigation can only be effective if it is a priority, integrated into an overall planning and development process with organizations and Governments, realized through networking strategies that enable and even encourage information exchange. Both multidisciplinary professional experience and intersectoral organizational relationships are essential if the strategy is to be both comprehensive and sustainable. It cannot succeed if it is regarded only as an additional consideration of disaster management, limited to singular event-based scenarios, or a derivative of emergency relief assistance focused only on the acute phase of hazardous events.

49. The reduction of potential losses depends on the commitment of both public and private leaders and organizations at all levels. It can only be sustained by an understanding embedded within the community based upon public awareness. This essential community support to practical activities also needs to be reinforced by a demonstrated expectation that the threat of natural hazards will be addressed. Consequently, the highest priority should be accorded to developing public awareness in order to bolster commitment to natural disaster mitigation at the highest levels of all organizations. Natural disaster mitigation must become widely accepted as an important public value within a community, and further recognized as an essential component of sustained economic growth.

B. Population concentrations and urban hazards

50. The global population is projected to rise to about 12 billion people by the middle of the twenty-first century, before levelling out. This growth will be accompanied by an even greater rate of increase in material goods and facilities to support this population. Thus, exposure to natural hazards

will steadily rise. Unless sustained actions are taken to reduce vulnerability and to increase mitigation practices, losses will continue to rise at an accelerating rate, as has become evident during the past 30 years.

51. Current trends indicate that this increasing world population is concentrating in urban areas, creating extraordinary demands on the physical environment and the facilities of modern life. Many of these resulting megacities have difficulty coping with day-to-day problems, and are poorly prepared to face the additional disruption and losses that a natural disaster brings. Concerted efforts are needed to address the vulnerabilities of megacities. Furthermore, as more population generally moves into coastal areas and other previously unsettled hazard-prone areas, the exposed risk to natural hazards is compounded in many countries. Countries — especially cities — need to evaluate the effect of these growth dynamics and address the trend in overall planning.

52. Megacities, expanding regional agglomerations and national systems depend on a complex infrastructure for their effective functioning. Roads, pipelines, power grids, telecommunications networks and similarly linked infrastructure systems are particularly vulnerable to natural hazards because a single break in the system can render the entire system useless. Barring specific capabilities for routing around disruptions, such as can be utilized in electrical grids, a failed system can also trigger numerous other cascading effects in other linked systems. Increasingly, communities will repeatedly be faced with massive failure of systems that they have come to depend on, further compounding their vulnerability. Redundancy or other provisions for contingent capacity must be addressed to a greater degree than has historically been associated with disaster management planning.

53. The potential for disasters caused by natural hazards on a scale not previously seen is a reality that Governments must confront. The earthquakes at Tangshan, China, in 1976, with 275,000 fatalities, and Kobe, Japan, in 1995, with losses in excess of $120 billion, are harbingers of the extraordinary loss and destruction that natural disasters can cause in a modern urban environment. Even greater losses are a real prospect as a sequence or combination of hazardous events, or the direct impact of an unusually severe hazard, such as hurricane Mitch demonstrated when it devastated several Central American countries and economies for years to come. Governments need to devote serious attention to the risks such events pose, and to begin to implement long-term sustained mitigation strategies to lessen their impacts.

C. Environmental and resource vulnerability

54. Much attention in the past has been focused on the threat that natural and human-induced hazards pose to people and structures. However, their threat to habitat and various ecosystems demands a similar priority, especially as ecosystems are often the basis for various forms of economic livelihood. The maintenance of productive fishing, agriculture, livestock-raising and forest product utilization is dependent on minimizing all forms of ecosystem degradation.

55. The recent global experience of the 1997–1999 El Niño/La Niña phenomenon graphically illustrates how natural hazards and related human behaviour can substantially impact the environment, habitat and essential resources of land, forest, water and even air quality. The extensive and persistent effects of floods and drought around the world come immediately to mind, but landslides, wildfires with the associated smoke and haze, and other hazards, such as severe and adverse temperature variation, are important in this respect as well.

56. Natural, human-induced and technological hazards pose a real and growing threat of long-term or permanent damage to the environment, ecosystems and biodiversity, on which all societies depend. With widespread global economic practices, vulnerability can easily increase because of linkages between human-induced and natural hazards that can multiply and magnify each other's consequences. Deforestation and improper land use practices can lead to increased run-off during rains. This may in turn lead to floods of greater severity, creating additional risks to industrial sites, further threatening chemical pollution of a habitat.

57. Realistic risk assessments in the future must take account of the growing potential for the combined effects of hazards, derived from both natural and human-induced circumstances, and their respective cascading effects. More attention must be given to their combined social and economic consequences inherent in increasingly complex societies, as well as to the more fundamental and long-term perspective of environmental and resource vulnerability.

D. Disaster prevention capabilities of developing countries

58. Advancing the practice of disaster prevention depends on recognizing the threat posed by natural hazards, evaluating options for addressing the threat, and assigning

a priority for implementing appropriate measures. Experience shows that progress in this endeavour depends on a continuing dialogue between authoritative decision makers in each risk-prone country or region and experts on the various aspects of hazard assessment and risk management. Therefore, every vulnerable country needs a national or regional capability for disaster prevention and mitigation, necessarily linked to contingent preparedness, response and recovery systems for use when the hazard exceeds prevention capabilities.

59. It is equally important to recognize that foreign consultants cannot usually meet this need on a continuous basis because they are not able to articulate the issues and advocate appropriate actions as part of the national decision-making process. Therefore, a priority should be accorded to assisting developing countries in establishing these capabilities.

E. Coordination and implementation

60. By undertaking the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, the Member States of the United Nations cast a spotlight on the increasing threat to modern societies of natural hazards. The Decade has provided a global opportunity to increase public awareness, motivate official and professional bodies, engage scientists and technical interests, and stimulate commercial endeavours in the promotion of new programmes. This focus provided by the United Nations has, together with a series of some of the most costly and devastating natural disasters during the decade, succeeded in raising the recognition and the feasibility of natural disaster reduction. Steadily increasing attention is being given to the matter by many international, regional and national organizations. As the end of the Decade approaches, the need for future responsibility and leadership in this area must be addressed.

61. As noted before, it is absolutely essential that all Governments and organizations concerned with economic development adopt natural disaster mitigation as an inherent value in their operations. Beyond this basic approach, there will be a continuing need for coordination among practitioners of mitigation at the regional and international levels. Furthermore, NGOs play an essential and highly effective role in regional and international coordination. The efforts of NGOs should be effectively linked with corresponding efforts by government entities and the private sector. The critical question is how such coordination can best be provided.

62. The United Nations took an important initiative in launching IDNDR, and some organizations within the United Nations system devoted substantial effort to furthering the goals of the Decade. Although such attention was at times overshadowed by other crises, such as large migrations of populations during complex emergencies, the United Nations maintained a sustaining vigilance on IDNDR. The programme areas of greatest priority and for which lead organizations in the United Nations system should be designated are (a) advancing the frontiers of science and education; (b) implementing scientific and technical programmes to monitor hazards phenomena; (c) promoting and implementing mitigation as an integral part of any economic development; and (d) implementing preventive measures to promote public health.

VI. Concluding observations

63. In launching IDNDR, the United Nations focused attention on the importance of mitigation in reducing losses from natural hazards and disaster prevention, and most importantly on how to ensure increased access to these abilities and resources throughout the world. Modern means of telecommunications and technological advances in global information exchange, networks and linking organizations provide resources unimaginable even 10 years ago. Numerous organizations have seized these opportunities, bolstered by a series of disasters during the decade that have vividly demonstrated the unacceptable costs of growing threats faced by modern societies.

64. Mitigation and prevention practices are now achieving a priority approaching that previously reserved for contingent emergency management activities associated with relief and recovery during the acute phase of individual disasters. Astonishing advances in communications, a greater utility in earth observation, the scientific understanding of hazards, and a much greater public awareness and acceptance of the feasibility of disaster reduction activities have all combined to demonstrate the effectiveness of timely early warning capabilities. Early warning is now recognized as an essential element of any comprehensive disaster prevention strategy. These concepts are now effectively being applied, aided by a much increased exchange of global experience spanning many different areas of professional endeavour.

65. The stage is now set, as all countries of the world move beyond IDNDR, for increased implementation of loss reduction methodologies and for achieving the goal of disaster-resistant communities. There is an unavoidable

responsibility to carry on the momentum to promote hazard awareness and the application of risk management practices for disaster reduction that national committees and other bodies of the International Framework have initiated. The need is a universal one that is relevant for all countries, but the components of sustained and successful disaster prevention are multiple. To accomplish them, policy and institutional perspectives are required among Member States and within individual countries that can demonstrate and even encourage or mandate multidisciplinary and intersectoral collaboration.

66. As the Decade comes to a close, there is also a crucial need within the United Nations system to place a distinct coordination function at a sufficiently authoritative level to assure inter-agency oversight of the planning, implementation and institutional synergies in natural disaster reduction. Various options have been suggested, including the establishment of an intergovernmental panel or a commission. Whichever form is chosen, in recognition of the inherent cross-cutting nature of the subject of disaster prevention, the decision must bring together all of the relevant parties. While individual implementation responsibilities should properly be exercised among designated agencies, matters of advocacy, coherent policy development and organizational coordination must rest in a collective inter-agency authority.

67. Disaster prevention for the future, with a full appreciation of the economic and social consequences of risks and society in the future, must involve issues and abilities of sustainable development, environmental management, science and technology, commerce and industry, and the encouragement of participatory forms of governance that contribute to social well-being and security. It can reflect no single professional culture because the natural hazards and risks to societies in the coming age will challenge and call upon collective abilities. This matter becomes even more pressing when it is recognized that more hazards of the future will be international in nature, with transnational demands on various forms of government polity.

68. As an ongoing matter of global concern that deals with major cross-cutting aspects of development, disaster prevention needs to be linked to all the relevant conclusions of the key United Nations conferences of the 1990s in order to implement strategies for reducing disaster losses in a coordinated, sustained approach for a safer twenty-first century. Ultimately, this cannot succeed unless and until there is a demonstrated political willingness to transform the available and emerging wisdom and demonstrated practical experience into accepted policy and resource commitments.

Notes

[1] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3–14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference*, resolution 1, annex II.

[2] Ibid., annex I.

[3] *Report of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Bridgetown, Barbados, 25 April–6 May 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.I.18 and corrigendum).

[4] See "Topics", in Munich Reinsurance annual report for 1998; and Munich Reinsurance press announcement of 28 December 1998.

Annex I

List of Scientific and Technical Committee members

William John Richard **Alexander**, South Africa (1996–1999)
Alexandra **Amoaka-Mensah**, Ghana (1990–1997)
Peter S. **Anderson**, Canada (1996–1999)
Anand S. **Arya**, India (1990–1997)
Franco **Barberi**, Italy (1990–1993)
Mohamed **Belazougui**, Algeria (1996–1999)
Mohammed **Benblidia**, Algeria (1990–1996)
Driss **Ben Sari**, Morocco (1990–1996)
G. Arthur **Brown**, Jamaica (1990–1993)
James P. **Bruce**, Canada (1990–1996)
Claudia **Candanedo**, Panama (1990–1996)
Barbara E. **Carby**, Jamaica (1993–1999)
Umberto **Cordani**, Brazil (1990–1996)
Mustafa **Erdik**, Turkey (1996–1999)
Alberto **Giesecke**, Peru (1990–1998)
Robert M. **Hamilton**, United States (1996–1999)
Youri A. **Izrael**, Russian Federation (1990–1993)
Ailsa, **Holloway**, Zimbabwe and South Africa (1993–1999)
R. P. **Karimanzira**, Zimbabwe (1996–1999)
Vit **Karnik**, Czechoslovakia (1990–1993)
Elizabeth **Kassaye**, Ethiopia (1990–1993)
Tsuneo **Katayama**, Japan (1996–1999)
Senipsi Langi **Kavaliku**, Tonga (1996–1999)
Vaino **Kelha**, Finland (1990–1996)
Takeo **Kinosita**, Japan (1990–1993)
Roman L. **Kintanar**, Philippines (1990–1996)
Michel **Lechat**, Belgium (1990–1996)
C. J. **Littleton**, Australia (1993–1999)
Liu Yanhua, China (1996–1999)
Giuseppe **Luongo**, Italy (1993–1999)
A. Ch. **Maskrey**, Peru (1996–1999)
Philippe **Masure**, France (1990–1996)
Alberto **Maturana** Palacios, Chile (1996–1999)
Ahmed Ibrahim **Naguib**, Egypt (1996–1999)
Bhuvarahan **Narasimhan**, India (1996–1999)
Isaac **Nyambok**, Kenya (1996–1999)
Thomas **Odhiambo**, Kenya (1990–1993)
Dallas **Peck**, United States (1990–1996)
Manuel **Perlo** Cohen, Mexico (1996–1999)
Erich **Plate**, Germany (1990–1996)
Aura Elena **Rodriquez** Marrero, Colombia (1990–1993)
Marilo **Ruiz** de Elvira, Spain (1990–1993)
Hermann **Schmitz-Wenzel**, Germany (1996–1999)
Eugene **Staffa**, Canada (1996–1999)
Atsushi **Takeda**, Japan (1993–1996)
Albert **Tevoedjre**, Benin (1993–1999)
Yuri **Vorobiev**, Russian Federation (1993–1999)
J. J. **Wagner**, Switzerland (1993–1999)
Xie Li-Li, China (1993–1996)

Annex II

Summary of Scientific and Technical Committee meetings 1990–1999

First meeting (Bonn, 4–8 March 1991)

Established targets for the Decade to complete national risk assessments and preparedness plans, and establish access to warning systems by the year 2000; adopted criteria for approval of demonstration projects; reviewed links to other related United Nations programmes on climate change, environment and development, and response to emergencies.

Second meeting (Guatemala City, 16–20 September 1991)

Reviewed disasters at Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines, Mount Unzen in Japan, and floods in China; adopted demonstration projects related to tropical cyclones, volcano hazards, earthquake hazards, information systems, education/research/training, risk assessment/preventive actions, public health, international centres, and megacities; and reviewed and endorsed plans for the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction.

Third meeting (Geneva, 16–20 March 1992)

Identified actions to be taken at the national level and established guidelines; adopted international demonstration projects proposed by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs/UNDRO, Habitat, UNDP, UNDP/UNV, WHO/PAHO, UNESCO, WMO, ICSU, WFEO/UATI, and IASPEI; analysed proposed studies on the economic benefits of disaster mitigation actions; adopted an information strategy; reviewed plans for the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction.

Fourth meeting (New Delhi, 1–5 February 1993)

Assessed progress with national committees and focal points; reviewed national programmes of Bangladesh, India, the Philippines and Vanuatu; heard a report on management of drought in India and earthquake in Jamaica; reviewed progress in demonstration projects and plans for an information strategy and the World Conference.

Fifth meeting (Geneva, 22–24 November 1993)

Completed plans for the World Conference, including guidelines for regional reports and public/private sector interface, and recommendations for the technical committee, poster and exhibit sessions; continued review of demonstration projects; prepared for mid-term review of the Decade by the General Assembly.

Sixth meeting (Washington, D.C., 27 February–3 March 1995)

Reviewed national, regional, and global disaster reduction strategies; analysed early warning and information systems; heard report on Kobe, Japan, earthquake; discussed the outcome of the World Conference and plans for the second half of the Decade.

Seventh meeting (Moscow, 11–14 March 1996)

Heard reports on a typhoon in the Philippines, lahars at Mount Pinatubo and reconstruction at Kobe, Japan; prepared recommendations on training for disaster reduction; reviewed and evaluated demonstration projects; issued the Moscow statement, which called on the United Nations Secretary-General and the executive heads of the specialized agencies to strengthen capacity-building of countries and communities at risk for vulnerability reduction and emergency preparedness as an activity distinct from humanitarian assistance, and include these functions within the development-oriented components of the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

Eighth meeting (Paris, 20–23 January 1997)

Reviewed plans for final evaluation process of the Decade; discussed transition process beyond the year 2000; conferred with United Nations agencies' representatives on plans beyond the Decade; reviewed activities of the French national committee of the IDNDR.

Ninth meeting (Geneva, 13–17 October 1997)

Reviewed the impact of disasters: volcanic eruption at Montserrat, earthquake in Italy, hurricane in Mexico, El Niño in Peru and South Africa, and earthquake in India; heard plans for new projects on early warning, earthquake risk assessment and flood investigation in northern Europe; developed plans for the closing process of the Decade, including recommendations for a high-level segment on the Decade at the substantive meeting of 1999 of the Council associated with a programme forum.

Tenth meeting (Washington, D.C., 8–12 June 1998)

Prepared an outline and plans for the final report on the Decade by the Scientific and Technical Committee; reviewed efforts to integrate natural disaster mitigation into sustainable development; reviewed the effects of El Niño in Ecuador and other countries.

Eleventh meeting (Canberra, 15–19 February 1999)

Reviewed the draft final report of the Committee on IDNDR; prepared the report for the substantive session of 1999 of the Council; reviewed plans for the programme forum; received a briefing on activities of the Australian national committee.

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Development of Africa: implementation of the recommendations in the report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council and the General Assembly, specifically the implementation and coordinated follow-up by the United Nations system of initiatives on Africa

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. Following its consideration of the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa (A/52/871-S/1998/318), the Economic and Social Council, at its substantive session of 1998, decided to undertake substantive discussions on the implementation of the relevant recommendations at its substantive session of 1999 (decision 1998/283). The Council further decided that the coordination segment of its 1999 substantive session would be devoted to the consideration of the theme: "Development of Africa: implementation and coordinated follow-up by the United Nations system of initiatives on African development" (decision 1998/298).

2. The General Assembly invited African countries and their partners during the coordination segment of the 1999 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council to identify and rank priorities in partnership, to define respective responsibilities and to agree on realistic and measurable targets in priority areas (resolution 53/92).

3. In accordance with those decisions the present report is divided into three substantive sections dealing with measures taken relating to the recommendations in the Secretary-General's report (section III); priority areas (section IV); and coordination by the United Nations system of initiatives on Africa (section V). The report draws on information provided by the organizations of the United Nations system and donor countries, both developed and developing.[1]

II. Overview

4. In order to enhance the prospects for durable peace, the Secretary-General, in his report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, calls for and highlights the importance of a substantial and sustained pace of economic growth and social development in Africa. For a brief period in the mid-1990s, African countries were able to reverse the years of stagnation and negative growth, and achieved growth rates of more than 5 per cent per year. Since then, growth has declined and was only 2.7 per cent in 1997 and 2.5 per cent in 1998. This marked two years of virtual stagnation in the region's per capita output, since population grows at 2.6 per cent per year. There was significant variation at the subregional level in 1998, with North and Central Africa experiencing improvements over 1997 while growth rates in gross domestic product (GDP) declined in eastern, western and southern subregions vis-à-vis 1997. Growth is expected to accelerate to about 3 per cent in 1999 and to 3.5 per cent in 2000 as a result of higher oil prices and higher demand for the exports of Africa. Moreover, growth in Nigeria and South Africa, the two largest economies in Africa, is expected to improve in 1999.

5. The slower growth in 1998 can largely be attributed to the sharp drop in export earnings, amounting to $18 billion. This was a result of lower oil and commodity prices and lower demand for African exports, which were both associated with the financial crises of 1997/98. A combination of good weather, which led to significant improvements in agricultural output, and an improved policy environment as evidenced, *inter alia*, by low fiscal deficits and inflation has been responsible for increased economic growth in a number of countries.

6. Growth in gross domestic product has not been strong or sustained enough to increase per capita income or make an impact on the levels of poverty in the sub-Saharan region. It has been estimated that 44 per cent of Africans as a whole and 51 per cent of those in Africa south of the Sahara live in absolute poverty. A recent report by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) also suggests that the goal set by the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 of halving poverty by 2015 would require a 4 per cent reduction in the number of people living in poverty each year, either through increased economic growth or through income redistribution. This would require a 7 per cent growth in GDP per year for Africa as a whole until 2015.

7. In this context, financing Africa's development is crucial. Improving primary, secondary and tertiary education, providing adequate health care, improving infrastructure, reducing poverty, reintegrating refugees and displaced persons from conflicts and catalysing structural transformation requires massive investment. The prospects for domestic resource mobilization continue to be limited by low savings ratios due to mass poverty and the subsistence income levels of the majority of Africans. While some room exists for reallocation of resources out of unproductive expenditure to build capacity, Africa's external debt continues to be a drag on its potential as the resources utilized to service its debt could otherwise be diverted to these important tasks. Africa's debt stock increased from $344 billion in 1997 to $350 billion in 1998 and is equivalent to over 300 per cent of exports of goods and services.

8. Beyond domestic resources, other sources of external finance, including foreign direct investment and official development assistance (ODA), have to increase to the levels

required to transform African economies and reduce poverty. Africa received $4.76 billion of foreign direct investment in 1997, representing 3 per cent of global flows. These inflows are highly concentrated in a few countries and are largely in gas, petroleum and other mining activities. Official development assistance remains critical to building capacity in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, especially when strengthening human, institutional and infrastructural capacities. However, ODA to Africa from countries members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) continues to decline, falling from its peak of $23 billion in 1992 to $18.7 billion in 1997.

9. It is in this overall context that the subsequent sections of this report need to be examined, the measures taken evaluated, priorities defined and recommendations on coordination of initiatives by the United Nations system made more specific.

III. Measures related to the implementation of the recommendations in the report of the Secretary-General

10. Since the submission of the report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council and the General Assembly in April 1998, a wide range of actions or programmes have been undertaken relating to the recommendations contained in the report.

A. Strengthening good governance

11. A number of activities have been undertaken by the United Nations system in the area of governance to support African countries in this area. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) organized, jointly with ECA, with a contribution from the Regional Office of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the second Africa Governance Forum at Accra (June 1998), on accountability and transparency. The Forum served as a platform to promote the concept of an instrument of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on the conduct of public affairs, which UNDP will also help to design.

12. One of the issues that has been emphasized is accountability and transparency in public administration. In collaboration with the Global Coalition for Africa, the World Bank has sent multidisciplinary missions to help each country identify the causes and effects of corruption and to propose means to address the causes. The World Bank's recommendations include measures to strengthen the capacity of parliaments to exercise their oversight roles; legal, judicial, financial and public sector reforms; and strengthening the media and such watchdog agencies as the offices of accountants-general. Six countries (Benin, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania) have requested assistance from the World Bank to establish national anti-corruption programmes and, in many cases, the Economic Development Institute's integrity programmes are supporting those efforts.

13. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat focused on two specific areas of activity, governance and ethics. In the former, it provided assistance to several African countries, including Burundi, Liberia, Mozambique and South Africa, in the development of national capacity for the promotion of good governance. The assistance covered three main issues, namely, human rights, justice and the participation of civil society. In the latter, a major Pan-African Conference of Ministers of the Civil Service was organized in Morocco in December 1998, attended by ministers of the civil service from several African countries. Key deliberations at that Conference concerned the promotion of professionalism and ethical standards in the civil service in African countries. The Conference culminated in the adoption of the Rabat Declaration.

14. Enhancing administrative capacity is also a critical part of promoting good governance. The World Bank is assisting in building capacity for decentralization and local governance in sub-Saharan Africa. The Bank is of the view that the pervasive weakness of local governments and the lack of capacity of municipal institutions in the region are major impediments to social and economic development. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has approved projects, *inter alia*, in Ghana, Guinea and Senegal, which build on this approach. It stressed that support for rural decentralization has become an important tool for strengthening the capacities of the local populations and promoting participation in the decision-making process. IFAD is considering the possibility of expanding its support for decentralization to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

15. The report calls on African countries that have not done so to ratify United Nations and African instruments on human rights. By and large, the majority of African countries have signed and ratified the major international human rights instruments. As at 21 May 1999, 42 of 53 African countries have ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and 40 have ratified the International

Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Forty-two countries have ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, while 48 have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Twenty-seven countries have signed the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and 30 have ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Fifty-two countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, making it the most widely ratified treaty.

16. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNDP have been active in establishing regional and country-level support for Governments in the elaboration of human rights action plans. As a member of the United Nations Inter-Agency Group on Gender and Development, the Office is planning to launch a legal and human rights literacy programme geared towards women during the second half of 1999.

17. Various United Nations organizations provided assistance in the drafting of national legislation as well as technical advisory services in their respective areas of competence. The Office of the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provided assistance in the drafting of national refugee legislation in countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, the Gambia, the Niger, Uganda and South Africa. Efforts are being made to have similar legislation adopted in other African countries, such as Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya and Rwanda, with a view to covering the whole continent. The International Labour Organization (ILO) gave technical advice on human rights questions and labour law revision, as well as on subregional training programmes for labour law judges on equity issues based upon an ILO manual for labour judges on the same subject. Its advocacy activities, among others, facilitated the support of African member States for the adoption in 1998 of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) provides high-level experts to assist in the drafting of media legislation. It is also carrying out two major projects, one on strengthening democracy and governance through development of the media in Mozambique, and another on communication and good governance in 10 West and Central African countries (Benin, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Sao Tome and Principe and Togo).

18. Bilateral donors continue to support several governance-related projects in Africa. The Government of Australia is providing support in a number of areas, including capacity-building or the reform of public institutions in Mozambique and South Africa. A special visit programme to Australia was also arranged for a group of High Court judges from Zimbabwe. The Government of Australia has also given a number of small grants for the development of civil organizations. France supports governance programmes, particularly in the area of human rights, and has allocated FF5 million for projects to support activities, including holding elections in a number of countries. The Government of Norway has established a Trust Fund for Good Governance in Africa and the Norwegian Resource Bank for Democracy and Human Rights, which provides experts in the field of democracy and human rights, is also available for use by the United Nations and others to support activities in Africa.

B. Social development

19. The United Nations and its agencies are involved in a number of activities geared towards creating an enabling environment for enhancing the effectiveness of the informal sector in both rural and urban areas. As lead organization for the priority area of the System-wide Special Initiative concerning poverty reduction through the promotion of the informal sector and employment-generating opportunities, ILO is promoting a series of interventions that include drafting appropriate macroeconomic policies; reforming government regulations, policies and institutions; providing appropriate incentives; developing market networks linking the formal and informal sectors; and providing physical and administrative infrastructures. Serious attempts are being made to maintain a gender focus in this component. ILO is also involved in strengthening the national capacities of constituents in the formulation of vocational training policies for both the formal and the informal sectors.

20. At a regional level, the ILO Biennial African Employment Planners Meeting has become a regular forum for reviewing the overall employment situation in Africa and recommending policies and strategies for employment promotion and poverty reduction. One major programme being implemented since July 1998 is the Jobs for Africa programme. Set up as a part of the Special Initiative and as follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, this regional programme provides an alternative policy framework for employment-intensive growth and formulates diversified and comprehensive programmes of action for job creation. The immediate objective of the programme is to develop and strengthen the capacity of national and regional institutions and networks in 10 participating countries (phase

one) to design and advocate alternative policies for poverty reduction through generating productive employment.

21. The report urges increased investment in human resources in recognition of its role as a driving force for development. The activities of the United Nations system under the Special Initiative in the field of education focused on improving primary education in 16 low primary enrolment countries, namely, Angola, Burkina Faso, Chad, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mozambique, the Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia and Sierra Leone, and on advancing basic education for all African children. United Nations organizations have also been involved in improving the quality of education in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Malawi, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.

22. There has been a steady progress in the area of primary education enrolment and advancing basic education for all African children. However, despite the progress, the low enrolment in primary education and the low literacy rate in the 16 selected countries is a matter of great concern. The proportion of the school-age population out of school remains high in many countries. It is observed that the efficiency is much greater when international institutions work together with the countries concerned.

23. Notwithstanding the improvement in the average life expectancy, infant mortality reduction and progress in the control of diseases, the overall health situation in Africa still gives cause for concern. Particularly, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS has already undone or threatens to undo many of the gains in child survival and quality of life achieved. HIV/AIDS has created a major development crisis, with 6 million new infections globally per year, or 16,000 a day, and 35 million persons living with HIV and AIDS. In 1998 there were 2.5 million AIDS-related deaths, even more than from malaria. In fact, evidence increasingly shows that in the more seriously affected countries AIDS is resulting in decreased life expectancy and increased child mortality. Furthermore, there is lost productivity, and the effects on the economy and development are starting to be more and more visible. Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 9 of 10 new infections in 1998. The epidemic is not only a major health concern, it affects all sectors of the economy and society and thus is of relevance to all United Nations organizations. The United Nations system is uniquely placed to make a difference through its political and its development work. The Joint and Co-sponsored United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) has intensified its action in Africa, in partnership with African Governments, regional bodies, bilateral development agencies, multilateral organizations, the corporate sector (with commitments from large pharmaceutical corporations, the entertainment industry and a Global Business Council on AIDS) and non-governmental organizations. The partnership will seek to develop, in participating countries, joint multisectoral action plans prepared with major national and international stakeholders and mobilize resources to fund them. Work is starting through country-based groups on HIV/AIDS.

24. Malaria prevention and control is another significant area where the efforts of the United Nations system are directed. The roll back malaria campaign led by the World Health Organization (WHO) aims to cut the number of deaths from malaria by 50 per cent by 2010 and 75 per cent by 2015. United Nations organizations continue to work together on the reduction of maternal mortality, which is closely related to HIV/AIDS and malaria in Africa, as well as to female genital mutilation.

25. As a follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, particularly relating to the commitment on Africa and the least developed countries, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is giving special attention to social policy issues of particular concern and the needs of specific population groups, including persons with disabilities, youth and the ageing. In various African countries it supports over 100 projects in the areas of social policy, poverty eradication and management of social change, and also provides advisory services in these areas. In March, 1999 ECA organized subregional follow-up conferences on the World Summit for Social Development, which provided opportunities for African countries to share experiences, including best practices, on the implementation of the Copenhagen Programme of Action. More importantly, the conferences adopted a number of recommendations to impart new momentum to the implementation of the commitments made at the Summit, emphasizing, for example, that poverty eradication and alleviation policies and strategies should be holistic, well targeted and participatory. Governments should review macroeconomic reform measures to ensure that they reflect social objectives, and should assess their impact on employment.

26. Some bilateral donors have taken steps to collaborate in the health sector with the organizations of the United Nations system. The Government of Japan plans to establish centres for parasitic disease control in Asia and Africa in close collaboration with WHO. The centres will provide training courses and operational research for parasitic disease control and contribute to regional cooperation, especially South-South cooperation among African and Asian countries. Japan and the United States of America plan to contribute towards ending the scourge of polio in Africa by expanding cooperative eradication efforts at the grass-

roots level by the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers and the United States Peace Corps Volunteers.

C. Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women

27. In 1998, ECA prepared "Status of women in Africa, 1998: 53 country profiles", a compilation of sex-disaggregated data on the status of women in the 53 ECA member States published in brochure format. The data contain selected indicators in some areas of concern contained in the Beijing Platform for Action, such as women in decision-making, education, health, the economic contribution of women and the rights of women and the girl child. The brochures are intended to serve as information, sensitization and advocacy tools by providing a clear picture of the extent to which Governments and other sectors of African society have succeeded in implementing international instruments aimed at achieving gender equality.

28. The Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is organizing a subregional workshop at Cotonou, Benin, in the latter part of 1999, on reporting under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which will be followed by in-country training components. The Division is also involved in efforts to encourage African States to ratify or accede to the Convention and to encourage those States which are parties to the Convention to submit the reports required under article 18 of the Convention.

29. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) contributes to the elimination of discrimination against women especially through awareness-building programmes and training programmes, especially in agro-industries. One of the most successful examples is an integrated training programme for the development of women's entrepreneurship in food-processing in the United Republic of Tanzania. Another example is a project aimed at assisting women manufacturers of textiles and garments to make the transition from the informal to the formal business sector in Kenya.

30. The Action for the Rights of Children training programme is a UNHCR initiative which is expected to be implemented in 1999. It includes a specific age-gender perspective and aims at increasing the capacity of UNHCR, government and non-governmental organization field staff to protect and care for children and adolescents in refugee situations. The initiative also aims at ensuring that girls and boys benefit equally from all protection and assistance efforts.

31. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has conducted a series of studies on enhancing the participation of women entrepreneurs in economies of least developed countries, in order to assess the impact of policies on promoting entrepreneurship among women and to identify those measures adopted at international conferences which have not been implemented but which need to be in place for women to become and remain entrepreneurs in the formal sector. The African least developed countries selected for the project are Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Madagascar, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

32. Through its Strategy for Women and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation programme, the Government of Norway seeks to strengthen the position of women, particularly with regard to the areas of poverty eradication and education. Working through the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Norway has contributed $15 million to basic education for girls in 19 African countries.

D. Improving trade flows

33. The organizations of the United Nations system and the donor community have taken some steps to assist African countries in enhancing their diversification efforts. UNCTAD and the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Trade Centre (ITC) have launched the joint integrated technical assistance programme, for which a trust fund has been established. Of an estimated requirement of $10.3 million, $7.1 million have already been pledged. The implementation of the programme started in May 1998 on the basis of specific country projects in eight African countries, organized into 15 clusters of closely related activities so as to achieve synergies and economies of scale. It also helps African countries to identify and take advantage of opportunities provided by the multilateral trading system as well as access through WTO to implement the provisions thereof.

34. In cooperation with five other agencies, UNCTAD is actively involved in the Integrated Framework for Trade-related Technical Assistance, including for Human and Institutional Capacity-building, to Support Least Developed Countries in Their Trade and Trade-related Activities, which was endorsed in October 1997. Twenty-two least developed countries, 16 of them in Africa, are currently in various stages of preparation for trade-related round-table meetings. Together with the International Chamber of Commerce,

UNCTAD has undertaken a project on investment guides and capacity-building for least developed countries.

35. At a meeting of the Secretary-General with representatives of Development Assistance Committee countries, held in September 1998 to urge the implementation of his recommendations on debt, ODA, market access and foreign direct investment, participants reaffirmed that, although efforts have been made to increase the market access for African exports in the framework of WTO and in the Lomé Convention, there is a need for greater access to the markets of industrialized countries. The Panel of High-level Personalities on African Development convened by the Secretary-General on 15 October 1998 also stressed the need to address high tariffs and tariff escalation that continue to exist in certain sectors of interest to African countries, such as agricultural products, textiles and clothing, and leather products. The issue of market access and the need for special and differential treatment for African countries will be addressed at an upcoming ad hoc expert group meeting on raising Africa's competitiveness in the changing global economy of the twenty-first century, organized by ECA.

36. In response to the Secretary-General's recommendation that improved South-South cooperation be used to reinforce export-led growth in Africa, the Republic of Korea organized, jointly with the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Forum on Asia-Africa Cooperation in Export Promotion at Seoul in December 1998. The Forum, which was attended by 22 African countries and 9 Asian countries and United Nations organizations involved in trade and investment activities, provided the opportunity to review both the Asian experience and the challenges facing Africa in export promotion and diversification, and adopted the Seoul Framework for Cooperation. The Government of India announced in 1998 the establishment of a $30 million revolving fund for Africa for promoting trade, investment and technology sharing, and for revitalizing bilateral trade with and investment in Africa.

37. Traditional donor countries are responding positively to the trade and investment opportunities available in African countries. The Government of Norway has established the Norwegian Risk Fund for Developing Countries to promote participation in the establishment of sustainable and profitable businesses in developing countries. In 1998, the first year of operation, 47 per cent of the Nkr 400 million allocated to the Fund was used to support investment in African countries.

38. The United States African Growth and Opportunity Act seeks to expand duty-free access to the United States market for goods now excluded under the generalized system of preferences and eliminates quotas on imports of textiles and apparel for countries which are pursuing economic and political reforms. The Act also calls for the creation of a United States-Africa economic forum to discuss economic matters of mutual concern and a United States-sub-Saharan Africa free trade agreement by 2020.

39. The rapidly changing global environment offers African countries an opportunity and a challenge to expand exports as an essential element in raising resources to finance development. However, much remains to be done to improve the competitiveness of African products in the international market and also with regard to the access to international markets for African products. The ECA Joint Conference of Ministers of Finance and Ministers Responsible for Economic and Social Development and Planning, held at Addis Ababa from 6 to 8 May 1999, called for the establishment of a special international fund to permit the restructuring of enterprises to enhance value added and competitiveness, so as to cope with globalization.

E. Improving financial resource flows

40. In spite of the general decline in the level of ODA to Africa, some donor countries have increased development assistance to Africa. For example, the United Kingdom increased its ODA budget in 1999 by almost one third, while the United States increased its assistance to Africa by 4.5 per cent in 1999 and proposed a further increase of 10 per cent for 2000. According to the Swedish Government bill for fiscal year 1999, ODA will increase from 0.7 per cent of gross national product (GNP) in 1998 to 0.73 per cent in 2001. Norway stepped up its ODA budget in 1998 to 0.91 per cent of GNP. The goal of Norway is to re-establish its ODA level to the previous level of 1 per cent and to increase its bilateral assistance to Africa from 46.2 per cent of its aid budget in 1998 to 50 per cent. Denmark has exceeded the target of ODA to developing countries and is contributing 1 per cent of GNP. Over 40 per cent goes to Africa.

41. The level of international expert technical assistance in official development assistance continues to be rather high, a concern noted in the Secretary-General's report. In an effort to redesign technical assistance to close the technical capacity gap between industrial and developing countries by accelerating the transfer of knowledge, skills and expertise, emphasis is placed on national execution of projects, pioneered by UNDP. UNDP, in cooperation with

the Federation of African Consultants, is involved in designing a sound framework to tackle this issue. The United Nations advocacy role is critical to the long-term solution of these issues.

42. The Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs[2] in a recent report entitled "Finding solutions to the debt problems of developing countries"[3] has made a number of proposals for an enhanced initiative on debt relief for highly indebted poor countries. The proposals include (a) extending the list of poor indebted countries eligible for debt relief; (b) shortening the length of the debt relief process from six to three years; (c) while sustainable levels of debt should be repaid, relaxation of the definition of what is sustainable so as to ensure that the levels set are realistic; (d) cancellation of all ODA debts of heavily indebted poor countries, while reducing other official bilateral debts by a minimum of 80 per cent, with full cancellation for post-conflict countries, countries affected by serious natural disasters and countries with very low social and human indicators; (e) meeting the cost of relief from partial sales of gold held by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), a fresh allocation of special drawing rights, and additional bilateral contributions to multilateral trust funds for debt relief; and (f) beyond debt relief, with new concessional resource transfers to poor countries to achieve sustainable growth. Debt relief, therefore, should not be given at the expense of ODA. In addition, the report notes that 11 highly indebted poor countries in sub-Saharan Africa[4] have been identified as having exceptional needs for post-conflict economic rehabilitation assistance. For these countries, measures beyond the framework of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative may be required, including new approaches for providing early assistance and lending into or providing assistance under arrears.

43. In response to the growing concern about the limitations of the Debt Initiative to effectively deal with the debt burden of highly indebted poorest countries, the majority of which are in Africa, the World Bank and IMF undertook a comprehensive review of the Initiative in February 1999 with a view to possible improvements thereto. Since the review, the World Bank has established a review consultation Web page, and consultative meetings have been held in Germany, Honduras, Mozambique, Norway, Togo, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, which brought together dozens of organizations and more than 500 participants.

44. In its 1998 Trade and Development Report, UNCTAD proposed the establishment of a body composed of high-level personalities and experts in finance and development, appointed jointly by creditors and debtors, to undertake an independent assessment of the debt sustainability of African countries, with an undertaking by creditors to write off debt considered unpayable. The ECA Joint Conference of Ministers of Finance and Ministers of Economic and Social Development and Planning, held in May 1999 on the theme "The challenges of financing development in Africa", adopted a joint ministerial statement that articulated Africa's views on a variety of international financial issues. The Ministers urged the industrialized countries, in particular the group of seven major industrialized countries, to take the lead in agreeing to complete cancellation of debts arising from bilateral aid for the poorest countries and reduction of all other bilateral debts of the poorest countries by at least 90 per cent, emphasized the need to foster a new donor-beneficiary relationship in which multi-donor programmes would focus on an Africa-driven agenda, and stressed the importance of adequate representation of Africa and its views in all international intergovernmental bodies that might be set up to consider reforms of the international financial architecture.

45. UNDP/Africa has also prepared a policy paper which contributes to the formulation of a UNDP institutional position on debt abatement with respect to the Debt Initiative, and explores the capacity-building implications of such a position. The approach is to outline a framework for a debt-for-sustainable-human-development window which would enable eligible countries to secure additional debt relief as an incentive to accelerate poverty alleviation and sustainable human development programmes and make some headway towards achieving the major goals of the international community in these important activities.

46. In recent months, France and other G-7 countries have formulated proposals for debt relief for the heavily indebted poor countries, including improvements to the current Initiative, for discussion at the economic summit (Cologne, June 1999). The proposals have in common a recognition of the need for further debt reduction, forgiveness of bilateral debt for the poorest countries, and flexibility in the Debt Initiative. The Cologne meeting is expected to endorse some concrete actions for debt relief for the indebted poor countries that go beyond past initiatives.

47. There seems to be an emerging consensus on the need to lower the threshold and target values for debt indicators. A number of proposals, including proposals from major donor countries, have been made to this effect, for example, the Mauritius mandate by the British Government in September 1997; the Cologne debt initiative of the German Government of January 1999; and proposed actions for deeper and faster debt reduction by the President of the United States of America at a conference on a United States-

Africa partnership for the twenty-first century in March 1999. Other proposals have been made by Canada, France, Italy and Japan.

48. There have been a number of positive developments recently at the bilateral level in relation to debt relief for African countries. In 1998, the Government of Norway launched the Norwegian Debt Relief Strategy, which aims at reducing the debt burden of the poorest and heavily indebted countries and enabling them to embark on the next millennium with a debt situation that will not be an impediment to sustained economic and social development. In addition to increasing its contribution to the IMF operations in favour of the poorest countries by granting an additional loan of $300 million for the period from July 1999 to December 2000, the Government of Belgium has committed itself to cancelling the debt of the last 40 years for countries that are not eligible under the Debt Initiative. These countries will be selected for debt relief subject to criteria such as good governance, respect of human rights and the rule of law. Already 12 African countries, including Benin, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, the Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia, have benefited from cancellation of their debt under bilateral arrangements.

49. In the context of the recommendations relating to attracting investment for stimulating growth and the importance of investing in infrastructure development, under a UNDP/national long-term perspective studies project, a forum to review the competitiveness of African economies was organized in Dakar in March 1999 in cooperation with the Government of Senegal, also involving UNCTAD, WTO, UNIDO, the African Development Bank, OAU, ECA and UNESCO. Its objective was to agree on steps to be taken to create a positive environment for investment and to enhance competitiveness. The review helped to take stock of the openness to trade, rationalized tax structures, adequate infrastructure, transparency and accountability as well as protection of property rights. That forum and other activities on investment and growth under way in the context of the Special Initiative trade cluster can provide a good basis for the Secretary-General's joint action with the Secretary-General of OAU to promote large-scale long-term investment, including multi-country infrastructure projects and exploitation of shared natural resources. UNIDO is also involved in promoting investment in Africa, convening investment promotion conferences for Guinea and Uganda and for the southern Africa region in 1998 and 1999. Additional activities are to be held in Burkina Faso and Madagascar.

50. In the context of attracting investment, the Secretary-General recommended the need to draw the attention of investors to progress and new opportunities in Africa. In this regard, the Internet is an effective mechanism for rapidly disseminated information to aid investment decisions. To promote privatization in Africa, the World Bank and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) created a specialized window within IPAnet, MIGA's Internet-based marketplace for investment opportunities, to launch Privatization Link, profiling investment opportunities arising from privatization. MIGA also supported private investment by issuing guarantees totalling $126 million covering projects in Angola, Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Kenya, Mozambique and Uganda, which facilitated $2.3 billion in foreign direct investment.

F. Support for regional cooperation and integration

51. United Nations organizations continue to support activities aimed at strengthening regional cooperation and integration. The Southern African Development Community (SADC), in cooperation with UNIDO, organized in 1998 at Windhoek a workshop with a view to defining or formulating industrial policy and strategies for SADC. The workshop was attended by approximately 40 high-level officials from the public and private sectors.

52. Significant support has been provided by UNIDO for the leather sector in Eastern Africa through a regional project involving nine countries, namely, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, the Sudan, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The programme's strategy is centred on the establishment of the Eastern and Southern Africa Leather Industries Association, which promotes skill development and technology upgrading across the entire range of operations in the leather cycle and provides direct support to business in the field of quality enhancement and pollution control, and facilitates partnerships with foreign firms. Projects implemented so far under this programme totalled $27 million.

53. UNESCO is working towards promoting regional and subregional cooperation in the area of telematics and the information society through a Regional Informatics Network for Africa which links focal points in 42 Member States concerned with promoting the use of information and communication technologies in development. Activities include coordination meetings and electronic discussions on the planning of cooperative activities and sharing of experience, support for subregional training courses, pilot projects on the application of telematics for development in sectors of public concern, and promotion of the African

content of the World Wide Web for educational, scientific, social and cultural development.

54. South-South cooperation has enormous potential for tapping the vast resources and experiences available in the developing world as well as forging subregional and regional cooperation. UNIDO has utilized the framework of the Second Tokyo International Conference on African Development as a vehicle for promoting South-South and triangular cooperation. UNIDO, in collaboration with Japan and UNCTAD, plans to implement a project to establish an Asia-Africa Investment and Technology Promotion Centre at Kuala Lumpur, which aims to facilitate partnership between Asian and African entrepreneurs and attract investment flows between the two regions. Similarly, ITC is currently implementing a South-South trade development and cooperation programme which is designed to strengthen the ties between the business sectors in Africa and other regions. UNCTAD organized an Asia-Africa Business Networking Forum at Kuala Lumpur in March 1999, with the participation of some 100 entrepreneurs from 10 African and 13 Asian countries, which led to over 15 cooperation and marketing agreements. Japan, in collaboration with UNDP, will also support the launching of the Asia-Africa Business Forum, where business people from the two regions will meet late in 1999 to discuss trade and investment promotion between Asia and Africa.

55. ECA provides a range of technical support, through its regional advisory services and subregional development centres, for institutional strengthening of the various regional economic communities in Africa. It has for instance assisted in the restructuring of the secretariats of the Economic Community of West African States and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). ECA has also undertaken feasibility studies on self-financing mechanisms for COMESA, which, in due course, will be extended to SADC. At the request of the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), ECA is assisting in relaunching regional cooperation and integration in that subregion. In pursuance of that effort, ECA has produced several major studies on the following subjects: strategic framework on regional integration and subregional cooperation; rethinking development in Central Africa in the twenty-first century; making regional integration the engine for sustained growth and sustainable development at the national level; programme for relaunching regional integration in the Central African subregion; and renewing ECCAS: 1999–2001.

56. Significant progress in the area of regional cooperation and integration requires a more genuine supportive attitude on the part of donors and international trading partners, particularly with regard to the development of common standards and equipment among neighbouring countries. **African countries, with the support of their development partners, should examine ways in which support for regional and subregional integration can be used to promote economic discipline and sound macroeconomic policies, and facilitate the establishment of solid institutional confidence-building links between neighbouring countries.**

IV. Priority areas under the current initiatives on Africa and possible priorities in partnership

57. The United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 46/151 of 18 December 1991, sets priority areas with the goal of promoting Africa's economic recovery and development. African countries agreed to implement economic reforms; intensify the democratization process; strengthen regional cooperation and integration; develop human resources, in particular science and technology; integrate population concerns into development planning; improve agricultural and rural development to achieve food security; protect the environment and promote sustainable development; promote investment and increase the role of civil society in national decision-making while intensifying South-South cooperation. Development partners committed themselves to supporting the implementation of these priorities and to facilitate a solution of the debt problem; increase resources flows; increase market access; support economic diversification; and encourage foreign direct investment in Africa while supporting regional integration.

58. Since the adoption of the New Agenda by the General Assembly, many intergovernmental initiatives have been launched in efforts to tackle the development challenges facing the continent. The most prominent of the initiatives defined by African countries themselves are the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution and the Cairo Agenda for Action: Relaunching Africa's Economic and Social Development.

59. Adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of OAU on 28 June 1995, the Cairo Agenda for Action was formulated against the backdrop of the economic crisis facing the majority of African countries and can serve as a good starting point for prioritization (see para. 70 below).

60. Among the initiatives for African development there are bilateral and multilateral ones, initiatives taken for the coordination of United Nations system-wide activities and initiatives taken by individual donor countries. They include the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative, the implementing arm of the New Agenda; several initiatives in the context of the United Nations, its agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions, such as coordination initiatives at the regional level which are part of thematic or sectoral programmes on Africa launched by a number of organizations. Significant examples are (a) the African Information Society Initiative (AISI) led by ECA and including UNESCO, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), UNDP, FAO, UNIDO, the World Bank and the International Research Center of Canada; (b) the United Nations Transport and Communications Decade in Africa, involving ECA, UNCTAD, ILO, UNDP, the World Bank, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and ITU; (c) the Alliance for Africa's Industrialization led by UNIDO and supported by ECA, UNDP, and the African Development Bank; and (d) UNESCO support for national news agencies and the Pan-African News Agency.

61. Donor initiatives include the Tokyo International Conference on African Development, the United States Partnership for Economic Growth and Opportunity in Africa, the Swedish Partnership with Africa, and the United Kingdom Initiative on Eliminating World Poverty.

62. The United Nations System-wide Special Initiative, launched in March 1996, aims to achieve greater impact at the country level, focusing on a number of selected areas, within the priorities identified in the New Agenda and the Cairo Agenda, which would benefit most from greater collaboration among organizations of the United Nations system. The focus areas for joint action included water for household use and food production; food security with emphasis on combating desertification and land degradation; governance, including peace-building; strengthening civil society and harnessing information technology for development; social and human development with emphasis on education and health; and resource mobilization focusing on debt relief, effective aid coordination, market access and domestic savings. Diversification of Africa's economies and regional cooperation and integration were added later.

63. Organized with the United Nations and the Global Coalition for Africa, the Tokyo Conference hosted by Japan in October 1993 identified the development of the private sector; regional cooperation and integration; emergency relief and development; international cooperation with emphasis on increased development assistance; international advocacy for debt relief; market access; and diversification of Africa's commodities as the key priorities for African development. The Tokyo Agenda for Action, adopted by the Second Tokyo International Conference on African Development, held in October 1998, also established a number of priorities based on widespread consultation among African and Asian Governments and the private sector, donor countries and international and regional organizations in a series of preparatory activities prior to the Conference. The priority areas include social development and poverty reduction, with the focus on education and health; economic development and the promotion of the private sector, with the focus on trade, investment and infrastructure; and good governance, conflict prevention and post-conflict development.

64. The United States Partnership for Economic Growth and Opportunity in Africa, launched in June 1997, contains a number of priorities that were selected to reinforce Africa's economic recovery. Its main elements are increased market access; the promotion of private investment; forgiveness of bilateral debt with support for maximum relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative; food security through market liberalization, export development and agri-business development; the modernization of airports; energy development; and support for regional integration through promoting investment policy harmonization, regional business linkages, financial sector development and privatization.

65. Sweden's Partnership with Africa initiative, adopted by its Parliament in 1998, also seeks to help African countries to realize their untapped growth potential and become more closely integrated into the global economy. The priorities were established in consultation with a number of African Governments and civil society organizations. The initiative covers trade development; debt relief; domestic resource mobilization, in particular strengthening of the financial sector; support for economic reforms; strengthening civil society organizations; and good governance, human rights and conflict prevention.

66. While not specifically for Africa, the United Kingdom's Initiative on Eliminating World Poverty will primarily benefit the world's poorest region. Its goal is to contribute to the elimination of poverty by seeking to implement international development targets on the basis of United Nations resolutions and major conferences. It aims to achieve this goal by implementing a series of programmes and projects around the following priorities: trade development, increased ODA, debt relief, promotion of investment, improved governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law and conflict prevention.

67. A successor agreement to the Lomé Convention is currently being negotiated. The framework for negotiations includes priorities such as more effective use of ODA; diversification of production and exports; human resource development, including science and technology development; private sector development and investment; regional integration; good governance, democracy and human rights; and the involvement of civil society in decision-making.

68. While initially focused solely on providing quick-disbursing funds to fill the gaps in the national budgets of low-income, debt-distressed countries undertaking economic reforms, the Special Programme for Africa launched by the World Bank in 1988 has shifted its focus on economic growth. Beginning with the third cycle (1994–1996), the Programme has been moving towards sector investment programmes in areas such as education, health, infrastructure and agriculture, with increased focus on poverty reduction.

69. The initiatives described above cover a wide range of priorities that could be considered by the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1999 as the basis for discussion between African countries and their development partners aimed at identifying and ranking priorities in partnership, in compliance with the request of the General Assembly in its resolution 53/92.

70. While the priorities in the various initiatives differ in specificity, they can be generally grouped under the broader priorities established by Africans themselves in the Cairo Agenda, namely, democracy, governance, peace, security, stability and sustainable development; food security; capacity-building and human resources development; structural transformation of African economies; effective mobilization and efficient utilization of resources; and regional cooperation and integration.

71. **While there is agreement on the broader priorities there are differences in emphasis placed on specific priorities, both at the level of African countries and at the level of bilateral donors. The Economic and Social Council may wish to consider how the array of priorities for African development, defined in different contexts, can be ranked as requested by the General Assembly to help in the process of harmonization of the various initiatives.**

72. While it is clear that African development is the primary responsibility of the African countries themselves, as demonstrated by the many initiatives outlined above, development partners are committed to supporting the efforts of the region in the spirit of shared responsibility and partnership. In order to ensure that goals are met and progress achieved, it is important to consider measurable targets in priority areas, as requested by the General Assembly.

73. At the more general level, the United Nations has adopted a target of 0.7 per cent of the GNP of developed countries for official development assistance. A target of 0.15 per cent of GNP was similarly established for ODA to the least developed countries, 33 of which (of a total of 48) are in Africa. The United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s, established a target growth rate of 6 per cent per annum for African countries and a minimum of $30 billion in net ODA by donor countries in 1992, which would increase at an annual average of 4 per cent thereafter.

74. Recent United Nations global conferences, including the World Conference on Education for All (1990), the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1992), the International Conference on Population and Development (1994), the World Summit for Social Development (1995) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), have also established landmark targets in a number of areas.

75. Many of the targets agreed upon relate to the social sector, in particular to poverty eradication, education and health, including reproductive health. While many of these targets are not specific to Africa, meeting them is critical in establishing and reinforcing the basic foundation for development. The Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (Paris, 1990) set separate targets for the development of least developed countries. **In the light of the recommendation made by the General Assembly and in view of the more general targets also applicable to Africa which have been highlighted above, the Economic and Social Council may wish to consider the linkages between targets, the establishment of specific new targets and their utility in the context of prioritizing, monitoring and evaluating the progress of initiatives and the development of Africa.**

V. Coordinated follow-up by the United Nations system of initiatives on Africa

76. The complexity and variety of economic and social situations prevailing in the African countries, and the diversity of their peace and security conditions (see A/52/871–S/1998/318), have been met by a variety of responses from the United Nations system in areas such as

peacemaking and peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and development cooperation. Africa continues to witness a significant expansion in the operations of the United Nations system.

A. Coordination of United Nations system initiatives

1. At the global and regional level

77. The Secretary-General's report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, and the United Nations system's response to that report through the Administrative Committee on Coordination, should be regarded as an integral part of the effort to strengthen inter-agency coordination in support of African development. The Deputy Secretary-General has been entrusted with the follow-up and monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations of the Secretary-General contained in the report.

78. In considering the system's response to the Secretary-General's report, the executive heads of the United Nations system, meeting in the Administrative Committee on Coordination in the autumn of 1998, fully shared the emphasis placed by the Secretary-General on the need for a comprehensive and holistic approach by the international community and the United Nations system in addressing the multifaceted problems confronting Africa. The Secretary-General emphasized the importance of linkages between security and sustainable development, on the one hand, and of interrelationships between the actions of Governments, the United Nations system and civil society actors on the other. The Committee endorsed the call in the Secretary-General's report for the United Nations system, the international community and the African countries to frame their actions within a broad common agenda. In the same context, the Secretary-General informed the Committee of the outcome of a recent meeting he had convened with the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Development Assistance Committee countries and of the response of African heads of State or Government, as expressed, for example, at the Tokyo International Conference on African Development, both affirming commitment and support for the overall approaches set out in the report.

79. As part of the common effort to mobilize political will and to achieve convergence in the system's actions in support of African development, the executive heads agreed to bring the Secretary-General's report to the attention of the various governing bodies of the system. To the same ends, the members of the Administrative Committee on Coordination stressed the importance of the full involvement of ECA and close interaction with OAU. They agreed that strategic and policy analysis relevant to the peace-building and development objectives set out in the report would be more systematically shared among them, and directed all the Committee's subsidiary bodies and other relevant inter-agency mechanisms to give special attention to ways of pursuing the objectives set in the report. Committee members also committed themselves to strengthening inter-agency consultations with a view to facilitating the harmonization of Africa-related initiatives, including in connection with the preparation of and follow-up to international and bilateral donor initiatives relating to Africa undertaken in collaboration with the organizations of the system.

80. At the intergovernmental level, the arrangements put in place for the implementation and the coordinated follow-up of initiatives on Africa are mainly those adopted for the coordination of the implementation of the New Agenda. Before its adoption in December 1991, the Committee for Programme and Coordination had introduced, in the medium-term plan for the period 1992–1997, a new programme entitled "Africa: critical economic situation, recovery and development" (programme 45), requesting the Secretary-General to prepare a system-wide plan of action for African economic recovery and development, in collaboration with the executive heads of the organizations of the United Nations system as the basis for system-wide coordination. When the New Agenda was adopted, all organizations were requested to establish, in their respective areas, specific programmes consistent with the orientations of the Agenda, devoting adequate resources to their implementation.

81. In response to those two requests, the Secretary-General elaborated in 1992 a system-wide plan of action, which was adopted by the Committee for Programme and Coordination and subsequently revised in 1994, including specific administrative arrangements to enhance coordination and advocacy work on Africa.[5] In 1997 the Committee replaced the Plan of Action with the System-wide Special Initiative.

82. The follow-up, monitoring and evaluation machinery set up at the intergovernmental level for the implementation of the New Agenda has since made an important contribution to enhancing the coordination of the activities of the United Nations system on Africa, as in the case of the review by the Committee for Programme and Coordination of system-wide activities on Africa and the mid-term review of the New Agenda conducted in 1996 by the General Assembly. The

Committee has carried out an in-depth evaluation of programme 45 of the medium-term plan for the period 1992–1997, and set up a new programme (programme 6 of the medium-term plan for the period 1998–2001) linking the Special Initiative and the New Agenda.

83. Sharpening the role of the Special Initiative as an instrument to advance the New Agenda, and strengthening the linkages between the two, have been a constant concern of the Administrative Committee on Coordination since the launch of the Initiative. The Committee has also endeavoured to promote closer linkage between the Special Initiative and other development cooperation undertakings, such as the Tokyo International Conference on African Development, the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative, the Alliance for Africa's Industrialization and ongoing and new programmes in the health sector as well as programmes for skills improvement and the informal sector. Through its subsidiary machinery the Committee has also worked to promote closer interactions between the Special Initiative and inter-agency activities related to the coordinated follow-up to global conferences.

84. In the same context the Administrative Committee on Coordination has encouraged and supported efforts at the country level by the resident coordinators and the United Nations country teams as well as representatives of the Bretton Woods institutions, to intensify their collaboration within the framework of the Special Initiative. The development of benchmarks designed to measure progress at the country level produced intensive inter-agency work, which was more advanced in the areas of education and governance than in other areas such as trade access, debt, and investment and employment promotion, although progress in this respect is also being registered.

85. In general the Special Initiative has already recorded good progress at the country level, particularly in clusters where lead agencies have a major role. This is the case in education, with UNESCO, the World Bank, UNICEF and UNDP; health with WHO and the World Bank; population and gender with the United Nations Population Fund; harnessing information for development with ECA; governance with UNDP and ECA, which have initiated an annual Africa Governance Forum series to exchange information and experience among Governments and civil society organizations; trade with UNCTAD, which, in collaboration with WTO and ITC, has developed an integrated framework for trade-related technical assistance for least developed and other countries; UNCTAD is also cooperating with UNDP in assisting the African countries in trade promotion and negotiations. Similarly, ILO, in cooperation with ECA, has played an important role in poverty reduction through the promotion of the informal sector and employment generation. As an integrated part of the Africa Governance Forum process, the joint UNDP/Department of Economic and Social Affairs comprehensive databases and analysis of governance activities are expected to enhance the in-country capacity for coordination and lead to sustainability.

86. In April 1998, at the first annual meeting of the Ministerial Follow-up Committee of the Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Economic and Social Development and Planning, ECA was requested to prepare a report on collaboration and coordination among the organizations of the United Nations system at the regional and subregional levels, to be submitted to the Conference at its 1999 session. Subsequently, the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1998/46, endorsed the recommendation of the Secretary-General to convene, on an annual basis, regional coordination meetings of the United Nations agencies engaged in regional and intercountry activities.

87. The first annual regional coordination meeting of the United Nations system in Africa convened pursuant to the Council's resolution was held at Nairobi in March 1999, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General. Addressing the effectiveness of existing coordination mechanisms, that meeting agreed that the creation of new structures of coordination at the country level should be avoided and that existing coordination arrangements should be streamlined and strengthened. It was also agreed that the Special Initiative could provisionally constitute an appropriate mechanism for the coordination of the United Nations system's work in Africa and that additional sub-themes or clusters could be included for that purpose in the programme.[6]

2. At the country level

88. The activities of the United Nations system are coordinated at the country level in various ways, according to the diversity of prevailing circumstances. Basic coordination mechanisms are established within the resident coordinator system, with the aim of harmonizing programmes and interfacing with the Government for a constructive policy dialogue. In all cases, the ultimate responsibility for coordination lies with the Government.

89. A few of those mechanisms will be highlighted here: strategic and programmatic frameworks such as the country strategy note, the common country assessment, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and thematic groups.

90. The country strategy note, established by the General Assembly in its resolution 47/199, has been adopted as a coordinating framework in 16 African countries[7] out of 33 countries worldwide (48.5 per cent of the total for Africa).[8] In several cases,[9] the country strategy note has substantially contributed to a policy dialogue with the Government, providing a coherent frame of reference for programming. In the last four years, country strategy notes have increasingly focused on the outcome of global conferences and the national commitments to implement them.

91. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework was introduced only in 1998 in a limited number of countries as part of the Secretary-General's reform proposals of 14 July 1997, and benefited from the policy guidance of the General Assembly (see resolution 53/192). Ten African countries participated in the pilot phase[10] and in eight of them the process of formulation has been completed.[11] Where the country strategy note was available, the UNDAF was harmonized with it, complementing that process and intensifying the coordinated and integrated response of the United Nations system to national priorities. In one country (Mali), an attempt was made to harmonize the formulation of the UNDAF with the preparation of the country assistance strategy of the World Bank. The initial stage of the pilot does not allow any assessment of its impact on coordination, especially since the UNDAF, during its pilot experience, was often prepared after country cooperation programmes were already formulated and approved. There are clear signals (e.g., in Morocco) that the UNDAF process is not only a planning tool but also a way to identify both the areas of convergence among funds, programmes and specialized agencies and possible gaps to be filled in order to maximize the impact of United Nations system activities in the host country.

92. The common country assessment, initially launched by the Joint Consultative Group on Policy in 1996, benefited from a renewed impulse since the new guidelines adopted by the United Nations Development Group in 1999, endorsed by the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions, stressed its role as a first step for the formulation of an UNDAF. The common country assessment is conceived as a fundamental input to the formulation of future UNDAFs and a useful contribution to the formulation or revision of country strategy notes. While the common country assessments undertaken within the UNDAF pilot are limited in number,[12] it is expected that the assessment will become a much stronger coordination instrument in all countries of the region.

93. Humanitarian assistance is an important component of the support provided by the United Nations system in several African countries. Its coordination has required, in nine African countries, the adoption of a specialized mechanism, the consolidated appeals process.[13] Although none of those countries has formulated an UNDAF, it is expected that the harmonization of the UNDAF and common country assessment processes with the consolidated appeals process will be further explored and analysed, in order to complement emergency relief with recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities, as well as promotion of sustainable development.

94. Another coordination tool for countries affected by special circumstances is the strategic framework. The Administrative Committee on Coordination adopted the generic guidelines for a strategic framework as a response to, and recovery from, crisis in exceptional cases, on the basis of the first experience attempted for Afghanistan. The framework has the potential to be a useful tool in Africa.

95. All the above-mentioned strategic and programming frameworks are potentially very powerful instruments for enhancing the coordination of United Nations system support to the African region, but their application to a limited, even if significant, number of countries indicates that much more needs to be done. It is expected that the generalized application of the common country assessment to most countries of the region will soon enhance collaboration among various partners, in the delicate phase of the identification of strategic issues. A key feature of the common country assessment is that it potentially involves not only the United Nations system but also other donors and a variety of national interlocutors.

96. Whether or not these strategic programming tools have been implemented in each country of the region, the primary coordinating role for the operational activities for development of the United Nations system continues to be played by the resident coordinator system, which works through the field-level committee,[14] with the participation of representatives of all organizations of the United Nations system with country offices. In most cases, the resident coordinator system also covers the coordination of humanitarian assistance and its harmonization with development cooperation activities of the United Nations system.

97. In those cases where peacekeeping dimensions are particularly relevant, the coordination function is often played by a special representative of the Secretary-General in the country or in the subregion, or a special envoy of the Secretary-General. Similarly, where humanitarian assistance is crucial, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs may appoint a humanitarian coordinator. Often the

special representatives of the Secretary-General are also appointed as humanitarian coordinators, while in other cases the functions of resident coordinator and humanitarian coordinator are carried out by the same person. In some cases the resident coordinator serves as the deputy special representative of the Secretary-General. This variety of arrangements is indicative of the complexity of coordination in countries where different problems arise concerning the relations among peace and security, humanitarian assistance, post-emergency or post-conflict situations and development.

98. Thematic groups, which usually report to the field-level committee, are crucial to enhancing system-wide coordination and policy dialogue with the Government, and as regular consultation mechanisms and interaction for the integrated follow-up to global conferences. They have been established in all those African countries which have regular development cooperation activities. They function according to the lead agency principle, reflecting the mandate of each organization. Other multilateral and regional institutions and bilateral donors often take part in these thematic groups. The participation of national authorities is often encouraged, and in many cases the Government has a lead role in chairing the groups. Civil society and non-governmental organizations are increasingly involved as important partners.

99. Thematic groups played an important role in the formulation of country strategy notes. They had an even more durable and significant impact where they were established as a follow-up to global conferences, although their effectiveness is uneven.[15] They are crucial in the formulation of the UNDAF. A preliminary review of the annual reports of resident coordinators for 1998 shows that the linkage between thematic groups, follow-up to global conferences and the formulation and monitoring of an UNDAF may represent an effective way of enhancing coordination, not only within the system, but also with other stakeholders.[16]

100. In several African countries, the thematic groups on HIV/AIDS represent one of the most successful examples of what this tool can do, involving major donors and civil society, often resulting in national plans or coordinating frameworks, and facilitating resource mobilization to support the implementation of specific programmes. Another example is the thematic groups established within the resident coordinator system as part of the ACC Network on Rural Development and Food Security, which was launched by the Administrative Committee on Coordination in 1997 with the aim of promoting specific initiatives for the follow-up to the World Food Summit. The Network is managed by FAO and IFAD, in close cooperation with the World Food Programme, and aims, *inter alia*, at fostering complementarities and synergies between United Nations organizations and other stakeholders and promoting information on best practices, also by making extensive use of information technology.

101. Other coordinating mechanisms extensively used in African countries are round tables, consultative group meetings and sectoral consultations, which play a special role in consultation with donors and resource mobilization for development assistance financing. Recently, the President of the World Bank proposed the formulation of a comprehensive development framework, with the aim of providing a long-term, holistic and strategic approach to the coordination of external efforts, integrating efforts of the United Nations system with the World Bank under the leadership of the Government. It is expected that linkages between the comprehensive development framework and UNDAF will be further enhanced to harmonize the two tools and make them complementary.

102. In spite of the overall progress in coordination efforts at the country level, several problems limit their effectiveness. First, the uneven decentralization of authority among organizations of the United Nations system generates imbalanced participation of each entity in the various mechanisms. Second, because of resource constraints, some organizations, though represented in the country, are unable to participate effectively in the coordination mechanisms. Third, Government capacity is at times limited in terms of human and financial resources.

103. **Taking note of the variety of country-specific situations and needs in the African region, which is also reflected in the variety of coordination mechanisms adopted by the United Nations system and host countries to ensure a harmonized and integrated response to national priorities, the Economic and Social Council may wish to request the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, as well as other multilateral and regional organizations and bilateral donors, to collaborate with the Government of each African country, and among themselves, in order to ensure the consistency of the various coordination mechanisms, favouring synergy, containing duplication, avoiding contradictions and simplifying, as appropriate, the modalities and procedures required by the functioning of these mechanisms.**

B. Harmonization of non-United Nations initiatives on Africa

104. As mentioned in section III of this report, a number of bilateral initiatives on Africa have emerged in recent years, including the Swedish Partnership with Africa, the United States Partnership for Economic Growth and Opportunity in Africa, the Tokyo Agenda for Action,[17] the United Kingdom initiative on poverty eradication and the initiative of the Republic of Korea on Asia-Africa cooperation in export promotion.[18] While these initiatives indicate that the United Nations goal of putting Africa's development at the top of the global agenda is receiving active support from the international community, they need to be harmonized with each other and with those undertaken by the United Nations system for maximum benefit to the recipient countries of Africa.

105. In terms of operations, the activities of the United Nations system represent a small proportion of the total flows of development cooperation with African countries, which include an important component from other multilateral institutions and bilateral donors. United Nations system coordination, to be truly effective, must be linked with the overall coordination of development cooperation with every specific African country.

106. Coordination of external assistance is a challenging task, which is the responsibility of the Government of the host country. There are several examples in Africa where the United Nations supports national efforts of the Government to coordinate external assistance. While consultation between the United Nations system and bilateral donors is generalized in all countries of the regions, there are cases where this consultation process is supported by special institutional arrangements, that is, donor contact groups, beyond the consultative group and round-table mechanisms, where the Government may request the United Nations system, or the resident coordinator, to support national efforts in this area.

107. Analysis of the bilateral initiatives discussed earlier in this report shows that most of the initiatives share common objectives and goals. Selected thematic consultations are frequently promoted in individual countries with a view to encouraging donor agencies to converge efforts in support of national initiatives. Such consultations also deal with mobilization of the resources required to implement activities in common areas or subregions. The consultation between the United Nations system and other donors could be intensified, under the leadership of the Government of the host country. A potential opportunity to expand such a dialogue could be the expanded implementation of the common country assessment exercises as an instrument not only for analysis but also for policy dialogue.

108. **In an effort to harmonize these initiatives, the United Nations can organize selected thematic consultations to be attended by representatives of donor countries and the host country to discuss common priorities at the policy and operational levels with a view to encouraging donor agencies to streamline and rationalize their respective development activities and bring them closer to those of the United Nations system. Such consultations could also deal with the mobilization of the resources required to implement activities in the common priority areas.**

Notes

[1] The following organizations and donor countries responded to the questionnaire:

Organizations of the United Nations system: UNIDO, UNESCO, UNEP, UNCTAD, UNHCR, UNDP, UNFPA, FAO, WFP, WHO, UPU, IMF, World Bank, ECA, ITC, IFAD, IMO, ICAO, ILO, ITU.

Donor developed countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, United States of America, Denmark, Ireland.

Donor developing countries: China, India.

[2] The membership of the Committee comprises: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Economic Commission for Europe, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Economic Commission for Africa, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations University, International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, United Nations Institute for Training and Research and United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

[3] ECESA/99/22. This report can be found on the Internet at www.un.org/esa/coordination/ecesa/eces99-2.htm.

[4] Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia and the Sudan.

[5] These administrative arrangements include the creation, within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, of the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries with the mandate to support and expand the advocacy role for Africa of the Secretary-General, assist

in global coordination concerning African development and related issues throughout the United Nations system, and provide substantive support to the intergovernmental machinery in its deliberations on Africa; and the establishment of the Panel of High-level Personalities on African Development with the mandate to address, *inter alia*, coordination issues.

[6] The ACC Steering Committee on the Special Initiative at its 8th meeting, held in New York in May 1999, endorsed the agreement reached at the first annual regional coordination meeting.

[7] Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, the Comoros, Eritrea, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, the Sudan and Zambia.

[8] As compared with other regions, the frequency with which African countries have adopted this instrument is significant. In addition, four other countries (Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Namibia and the Niger) have produced final drafts. Nevertheless, this shows that only a minority of African countries have adopted the country strategy note as an instrument of coordination.

[9] In all cases, the preparation of the country strategy note has enhanced information exchange among United Nations organizations, has increased their coordination and has been a team-building process. The leadership of the Government in the preparation of the country strategy note and the participation of national authorities have been effective in several countries. Typical examples where this process was particularly productive are, *inter alia*, the cases of Morocco, Senegal and Zambia. However, in other countries their involvement, especially at the level of line authorities, has been inadequate. An assessment of the country strategy note process was undertaken at the 1998 triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development (see A/53/226/Add.1).

[10] Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

[11] This is the case of Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Senegal, and Zimbabwe.

[12] Only five countries (Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique and Zimbabwe) of the pilot group have already completed a common country assessment. However, in many other African countries there are several other analytical instruments already available, such as human development reports promoted by UNDP, poverty assessments promoted by the World Bank, social situation assessments of various kinds promoted by UNICEF, WHO and UNFPA, agricultural assessments launched by FAO or IFAD and food security studies conducted by WFP, which represent a good foundation for the common country assessment.

[13] This is the case in Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Somalia, the Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.

[14] See General Assembly resolution 47/199, para. 40 and resolution 50/120, para. 41.

[15] An example of best practice is that of Mauritania, where a thematic group on rural development and food security was established in 1998, under the leadership of FAO, with the participation of representatives of WFP and UNDP and, from the national side, the Ministry of Fisheries and Maritime Economy, the Cabinet of the Prime Minister, the Food Security Commission, the Commission for Human Rights and Poverty Eradication, the Development for Women Affairs and several non-governmental organizations. The group prepared a follow-up report on the World Food Summit, which contains also a vulnerability assessment and mapping in terms of food security.

[16] A good example is the case of Ghana, where a working group on gender was formed, within the framework of UNDAF, drawing on gender focal points of all organizations of the United Nations system, including Bretton Woods institutions.

[17] The Government of Japan initiated the Tokyo International Conference on African Development, which culminated, in October 1998, in the adoption of the Tokyo Agenda for Action. The Agenda encompasses social development and poverty reduction with focus on education and health, economic development and promotion of the private sector, with focus on trade, investment and infrastructure, and good governance, conflict prevention and post-conflict development.

[18] The initiative is the result of the Forum on Asia-Africa Cooperation in Export Promotion held at Seoul in December 1998.